ELEONORA DUSE
PLAYS

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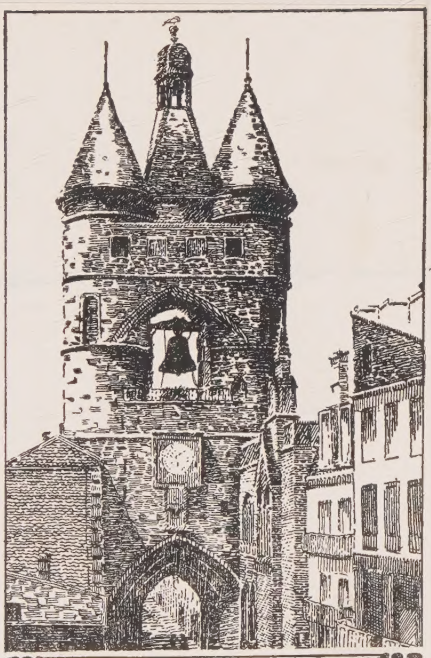

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THE ELEONORA DUSE
SERIES OF PLAYS

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THE ELEONORA DUSE
SERIES OF PLAYS

DIRECTION OF MORRIS GEST

EDITED BY OLIVER M. SAYLER

THY WILL BE DONE
BY GALLARATI-SCOTTI

GHOSTS
BY HENRIK IBSEN

THE LADY FROM THE SEA
BY HENRIK IBSEN

THE CLOSED DOOR
BY MARCO PRAGA

THE DEAD CITY
BY GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO

NEW YORK
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THY WILL BE DONE

BY

GALLARATI-SCOTTI

English Translation by

VALERIE PETRI

INTRODUCTION

DUSE once more in America! For the first time in two decades. And for the last time—her farewell. *La Duse!* She whom Arthur Symons, most sensitive and subtle of English critics, called "a chalice for the wine of imagination"; whom Bernard Shaw, in his turbulent and iconoclastic days as esthetic justice of the *Saturday Review,* accepted without reserve while savagely puncturing the illusion of Duse's only rival for world favor on the modern stage, Bernhardt; whom poets have lauded in every tongue; who has been as potent, as unforgotten, during her long absence from the playhouse as she ever was during her most active days!

The return of Duse would be enough in itself to make a season. It accomplished just that in London last summer, rescuing the British capital from desperate dullness and making it haven for visitors from a dozen countries. But the return of Duse to America has other and broader significances than those which are intrinsic. The time and the circumstances lend it a meaning fraught with deep and lasting importance for our own awakening theatre, for it is

Morris Gest who acted while others delayed and on summer holiday in Europe added the world's greatest tragedienne to his esthetic league of nations, already numbering the Moscow Art Theatre, Balieff's Chauve-Souris and Professor Max Reinhardt and "The Miracle." From these, Duse requires aid no more than they from her. And yet the stimulus resulting from their mutual and simultaneous appearance among us is like four candles in a room at once as compared with a succession of single candles. We need light, we crave it; and, thanks to Gest's initiative and daring, we shall have it.

Duse requires no introduction, no herald. We of the younger generation who have known her as a princess in a fairy tale, you who treasure her last visit to our shores so long ago—we both have known her, have felt her power, have been more courageous and hopeful because she still lived. And yet the intervening years have been so full of other names and other faces that a résumé of "who is Sylvia, what is she" may not be amiss.

Born "trooping," Duse has ever been of, by and for the theatre. But her position as aristocrat and queen of the theatre international was the reward of years of patient labor, of untold and untellable suffering. Her family had been actors for three generations, stemming from two brothers, Luigi and Federico, born over a century and a

quarter ago. The Garibaldi Theatre in Padua was the professional homestead of the Duses, but the slender child's father and mother inherited slight talent, and from the age of twelve she was their mainstay, dauntlessly and successfully playing rôles twice her years in the lesser theatres or in the fields when there were no funds to rent a more pretentious stage. Minor theatres hailed her in Dalmatia, too, across the Adriatic. And then came her discovery at the hands of the gay Neapolitans, and particularly by Cesare Rossi, father of the tragedian, who recouped her fortunes and his own by routing her through South America as an infant prodigy.

It was Paris, though, as so many times before and since in the realm of art, which opened Duse's door to the world. Not only to its own cosmopolitan world but, by the rumor of its emphatic verdict, to the stages of Germany, Russia, Austria and Bulgaria and finally in 1893 to distant America. The story of that first engagement at the old Fifth Avenue Theatre had better be left untold, for although the youthful visitor won critical acclaim, her audiences were scant. We had not yet learned to think in terms of a world theatre that knows no bounds of language. I doubt whether we really learned to do so until within the last two or three years since a war of worlds compelled us to think and feel and see in terms other than of ourselves. Perhaps it is just as well that

Duse's return has been deferred so long! We at last are ready for her before it is too late for her to be still ready and potent for us.

Of course, the great question upon her emerging from the long retirement that dates far back of the war was whether she would still possess the potent spell which of old she cast over her audiences. Timid trial in Italy was dubious proof, for although there is no more exacting audience in the world, *La Duse* was of their own blood, reputation, tradition. Even a few scattering visitors from abroad who saw these trials were not wholly credited. Who could tell but that they had fallen victim to the atmosphere surrounding them? And when in Rome——.

And so the real trial was deferred. London became the jury, the staid, reserved audiences by Thames-side. Last summer. And without retiring to consider a verdict, judgment was pronounced on the spot. Duse was still *La Duse*, without peer or rival. Out of the chorus enforcing and reiterating that verdict, I choose but two, Maurice Baring and St. John Ervine, both known intimately to American readers and playgoers for esthetic sanity, poise and judgment. Said Baring recently in *Vanity Fair:*

"The younger generation, who knew of Duse only by hearsay, were, of course, anxious to see her and to know whether they agreed with the dithyrambs they had read by

an older generation of critics. They were not disappointed. 'She can never,' I heard one of the youngest and most brilliant of Oxford undergraduates say, 'have been as beautiful as she is now.' Duse appeared in three plays: 'The Lady from the Sea' and 'Ghosts' by Ibsen, and in *'Cosi Sia'* ('Thy Will Be Done'), an Italian mystery play by Gallarati-Scotti. The first play she appeared in was 'The Lady from the Sea,' and she had not been on the stage a minute before all doubts were at an end.

"Yes, she looked older, considerably older; her face seemed to have been ravaged by sorrow, but she seemed to be more, instead of less, beautiful, and time, which had whitened her hair and hollowed her cheeks, had added, it seemed, further mystery to the depth of her eyes, and had enlarged and enriched the range and the tone of her voice. The movements, the grace, the supersubtle skill with which every point was made, were as wonderful as ever, and there was something more: a greater depth, a greater width, something, perhaps, that only the years can give.

"After Duse had been on the stage talking and moving for a few minutes, you no more bothered to think whether she was young or old than you questioned the presence of the footlights or the stage properties. What she was doing was right, inevitably, and she held the whole great audience in the hollow of her hand."

The report of the author of "John Ferguson," "Jane Clegg," and "Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary," in the *London Observer* is just as unequivocal: "There were periods in the play when she enabled us to dispense with language. It was not necessary for us to understand what she was saying, because we understood what she was feeling. The greatest feat which an actor can perform is to take an audience beyond the barriers of speech. . . .

"She seemed, on first entering, to be a tall woman, taller, perhaps, than she really is. Her hair is almost white, and her intense and pale face is deeply lined and full of suffering. Her eyes are like big, black fires. Her lovely hands are never still, yet are not restless. She has the power which no other actress, known to me, possesses, of transmitting physical qualities to her very clothes; when she drops her shawl from her shoulders at the end of the second act after a period of trouble, it seems to be as weary as she is, to have gathered weariness into its folds, so that it drops almost to the ground in sheer fatigue. In some strange and inexplicable way she is able to communicate sentience to insentient things. Her acting is entirely quiet acting. She does not roar and shout, nor does she throw herself up and down the stage like a demented steam roller. She speaks the most poignant things in a tone that seems no louder than that in which we would make a request for the sugar, and yet she

leaves us clearly conscious of the sorrow of those who are lonely in mind."

Just what is the secret of Duse's genius, of the spell she imposes on those who sit in her presence has taxed the vocabulary and the powers of esthetic analysis of a generation of critics and philosophers. "Realist," she has been called, because her art, in contradistinction to that of Bernhardt, has always been characterized by the strictest economy of means, by the minimization of the outward manifestations of the emotions, after the manner of the Russians in playing Tchekhoff, rather than by the florid, grandly excitable and exciting outbursts and passionate patterns of the great Frenchwoman. And yet, in the way she leaves the author and his text behind to create out of herself something new, something usually transcending the conception of the author, she borders closely on the technique of the masters of that elder glory of the Italian stage—the *commedia dell'arte* of the Renaissance.

To quote Baring again: "Duse's art in everything she plays is a gradual process of preparation, which begins from the first moment she walks on to the stage: she phrases every *leit-motif* and theme subtly and progressively with divine economy of effort until she reaches a culminating point, so that when the culminating point, the climax, comes, it seems to make itself. All style, at these moments in Duse's acting,

disappears; she gets beyond style and nature. She reminds one of Matthew Arnold's saying about Wordsworth's poetry, that Nature seemed at times to take the pen from him and write for him. Duse becomes at these moments—Nature herself."

We may see even more closely, perhaps, into the secret of Duse if we turn to the study of her and her art by her countryman, Piero Gobetti, a portion of whose *"La Frusta Teatrale"* ("The Theatrical Whip") is thus translated by Arthur Livingston:

"Eleonora Duse is not an artist: she is a religious spirit. Modern only in the sense that she is a romantic figure, conscious of the limits of her romanticism, she has attained maturity through a religious revelation of genius. Her mysticism is as vital as it is fertile. It may seem morbid to a sophisticated criticism, but it is a precise spiritual reality, which oversteps all rational bounds because it does not try to usurp the field of our rationality. She never interprets: she reveals pulsations of her own soul and works through these. Her recitation impresses us in no sense as a medium (between an author and a public) in any sense of the word, but as a true mystic experience in every aspect of which the Divine is immanently present. Eleonora Duse presents the remarkable case of a savage, a primitive originality stepping out of the gilded decadence of the late nineteenth and early

twentieth centuries. Yet we should not use for her the worn-out formulas of 'divine inspiration,' of 'other worldly intoxication,' of 'trans-humanization.' Her religious life is still a synthetic activity, which, with its very avoidance of expressive means, is the synthesis and the measure of a personality. . . . Our impression of her is perhaps complete if we think of her religious attitude as a state of mind consoled with solitude and with a certain shy aristocratic intimacy."

To the present generation, whatever Duse should choose to do would be new. Not to those of her own age, the arbiters of artistic and dramatic taste and reputation, in Italy. Knowing ones sat unmoved two years ago while she revived Ibsen and Praga. But could she create a new rôle, build with a body and an imagination so long denied practice a fresh conception, fire into life the work of a new playwright? The answer, an unmistakable affirmative, came when she produced the play with which this series begins, the play with which she will inaugurate her farewell tour in America at the Metropolitan Opera House on Monday evening, October 29, *"Cosi Sia,"* by Count Tommaso Gallarati-Scotti.

In reaching for something new, something without a tradition of her own or of others to guide her in her determination to confute those who still doubted, Duse made no com-

promises. She singled out a young playwright who had never had anything produced. Scotti stands high among the younger generation of Italian writers, but *"Cosi Sia"* is his first play, extremely, almost tenuously, simple. Milanese, son of the Marquis of Molfetta, he has reached a responsible position, after apprenticeship as pupil of Fogazzaro, as editor of the Modernist Review, *Il Rinnoamento*. The simplicity, even bareness, of his play, however, fit admirably into Duse's requirements, for out of a hint, a line, a phrase, here and there, she builds up a characterization of the Mother which is the epitome of motherhood in all times and all lands.

It is most auspicious that Duse is coming to us in a season when we are to be the favored recipients of still further treasures out of the rich repertory of the Russians and of first taste of the art of Reinhardt in person, for to her both Stanislavsky and his company and the great Austrian are deeply beholden for stimulus and inspiration in their art. It was Duse's visit to Moscow thirty years ago which, on the heels of the visit of the Meiningen company, gave Stanislavsky and Nemirovitch-Dantchenko the courage to revive and recreate dramatic art in the Kremlin City, just as it was her visit to Vienna about the same time that fired the youthful Reinhardt in his gallery seat to pursue the career of an actor precedent to that of producer. Our stage today

is just as ripe and ready for rebirth as were those of Russia and Central Europe thirty years ago. Who will be the youthful Stanislavsky, the impressionable Reinhardt, who will sit in the top gallery at the Metropolitan or the Century Theatre and thrill with the dream of leadership in the presence and under the spell of the same Duse?

THE EDITOR

CAST OF CHARACTERS

THE MOTHER.
SIMONE — *The father.*
THE DOCTOR.
THE CHILD.
ANGELA.
THE CRIPPLE.
THE BLIND ONE.
ANDREOTTO — *The veterinary.*
ALVINA.
GEMINA.
MARINA.
ONORIO — *The druggist.*
LUCA — *The baker's son.*
GIOVANNI — *The son.*
THE SACRISTAN.

The action takes place in and near an Italian village today.

ACT ONE.

"THE VOW."

SCENE.

A large, white-washed bed room, with a few pieces of walnut furniture such as are found in the homes of the small, rural bourgeoisie. The large double bed stands against the wall facing the audience. At the foot of that bed stands the sick child's crib. In back, at the head of the crib, on the left wall, a stand holding a painted statue of the Madonna — our Lady of Sorrows. In the corner between the wall and the bed, a desk in which money is kept.

The action takes place in the late hours of a night in May. The room is yet shrouded in gloom. Only a white porcelain oil lamp diffuses the soft rays massed under its shade of green cardboard. The shutters of the window opening on a veranda are closed.

Close to the sick child's bed stands the mother, anxiously looking at the doctor who is feeling the child's pulse. In the opening of the chimney which is at the left, crouching and almost hidden in the folds of her black shawl, another woman keeps watch — a young woman, humble, sad — Angela.

THE MOTHER [*to The Doctor who holds the child's pulse*] Does it beat?

THE DOCTOR. It's weaker . . . much weaker.

THE MOTHER. But it still beats . . . doesn't it?

THE DOCTOR. Yes, but . . .

THE MOTHER. If it beats, there's hope. You told me that perhaps — towards dawn . . . it's nearly dawn now . . .

THE DOCTOR. I don't believe I ever told you anything that could give you false hopes.

THE MOTHER. I remember your words: they gave me strength throughout the night.

THE DOCTOR. What can I have said?

THE MOTHER. You said he might be out of danger at morn. . . . These hours seemed ages . . . I thought the night would never end. But now it will soon be light. A little while ago I heard a rooster crow. [*The Doctor shakes his head in a doubtful way. There is a pause*] Doctor?

THE DOCTOR. What more can I do?

THE MOTHER. What more can you do? . . . Then he is very ill?

THE DOCTOR. Very.

THE MOTHER. Is he worse than yesterday?

THE DOCTOR. There's only a breath of life left.

THE MOTHER. Only a breath? . . . Then why did you let me hope all these hours?

THE DOCTOR. I have always told you the truth. Only a moment ago I told you that my work here was finished.

THE MOTHER. Finished? . . .

THE DOCTOR. That now my presence here is useless.

THE MOTHER. Useless? But if he still lives it is not useless, Doctor. . . . What are you saying? You can't leave me here, all alone in the night, as if he were already dead. You can not. Try some other remedy. Try . . . I beg of you . . . I beseech you. Listen . . . he's breathing. . . . Something must be done.

THE DOCTOR. On my conscience, if I could have done something to save him I would have done it. I, too, am a father, and I have taken care of this baby with as much love as if it were my own. You can believe me.

THE MOTHER. But surely not everything has been

done. You can't tell me that: that everything has been tried. I am an ignorant woman, I know, but there are certain things that I know, Doctor. I have been told that dying ones have been saved, at the very last moment, by opening the veins and pouring in them fresh and healthy blood; that some mothers have given their blood for their babies and have seen them come back to life . . . I have been told that by persons who had seen it. . . . Yes, yes, they came back to life and strength. Ah, Doctor, open my veins, draw my blood. Kill me if it is necessary. What do I care if you kill me? They'll bury us both in the one grave. I am so tired. . . . But should the attempt succeed, think of it: his mother's blood will have given him life twice; my blood coursing through his body, up to his heart, like a warm rain on a withered plant, from the very roots up, up through its branches; . . . that will cause him to open his eyes and see once again all the things he loved . . . his toys . . . his little cat . . . Doctor, try, try!

THE DOCTOR. It would be a miracle.

THE MOTHER. Well, then, perform that miracle. You once said, at poor Santina's bedside, do you remember? "In times gone by there were saints who performed

miracles; now we are here." Well, now is your chance to show what you can do. Perform that miracle with my blood. . . . [*The Doctor shakes his head sadly, and does not answer. The Mother goes on, in a more exalted voice*] You must do it. Don't waste another moment. Go! Get the necessary instruments. Buy them at any price. I'll find the money. We mothers always find the money necessary to save a child . . . I still have a little gold left from my dowry. . . . But you must go at once . . . at once. You must not waste a moment. My heart tells me we must hurry, because in this room there is . . . [*She shudders in fright. The Doctor looks at her with compassion and says nothing*] Doctor, why do you look at me so? [*The Doctor lowers his head*] Then you don't wish to try the last remedy?

THE DOCTOR. I cannot.

THE MOTHER. You cannot?

THE DOCTOR. He is dying.

THE MOTHER. Dying? . . .

[*Her body becomes rigid, her glassy pupils dilate while meaningless words tumble forth between her clenched teeth. The Doctor takes her hands in his, kindly, and tries to calm her.*]

THE DOCTOR. Calm yourself. . . . Do not let yourself go. Now there is nothing more to be done but to bow to fate's decree. Despair will not help you. Let the child sleep his last sleep in peace.

THE MOTHER. Sleep his last sleep in peace . . . [*She repeats the words slowly, in a frightened tone*] Then . . . he is dying?

[*She remains a few moments on her feet. Then, like one who no longer has strength, she drops without a cry, without a tear, on a low chair, rests her elbows upon her knees, leans her chin upon her clenched fists, and remains petrified in her grief, bewildered eyes staring into space. The Doctor bends over the dying baby, caresses him with a fatherly hand, watches him for a few moments, then leaves the room silently; The Mother makes no sign of life. After a few moments, steps are heard on the stairs. The door opens, and Simone, the father of the child, enters noisily. He moves and talks like a man half tipsy. He looks at his wife stupidly, then goes to her.*]

THE FATHER. What are you doing? . . . are you crazy?

THE MOTHER [*aroused, in a thin voice*] He is dying . . . dying . . .

THE FATHER. Eh, I know it. The Doctor told me a moment ago as I met him on the stairs. . . . What can you do? Babies come and go easily in this world. . . . One comes, the other goes . . . that's the way . . . One mustn't take them to heart too much. I have told you often they are frail money boxes.

THE MOTHER [*with a sob*] Don't speak so, Simone! Isn't it enough that you have spent this very night in ribaldry to come in, as usual, filled with wine and flesh . . . One would think some one had taken from you the little feeling you professed to have for your child. . . . Now you speak of it as if it meant no more to you than one of the cattle in your stable.

THE FATHER. Shush! Don't exaggerate. I am his father. I have my feelings, too. But what I can't stand are your affectations . . . I'd like to see myself putting up with your tears for the remainder of my days. You must have money, to spend your time crying from morning till night. Weeping is an occupation for the wealthy, and their sorrow lasts them years because they have nothing else to do. But we, who must work for our living, must go through our calendar quickly. . . . You should have married another man if you wanted to spend your days

weeping. . . . You were brought up in a convent, by the nuns, you read novels and poetry . . . you should have married a sentimental man. . . . But your father gave you in marriage to a cattle dealer so you wouldn't mold in his house, and you must adapt yourself to his mode of living . . . to his will.

THE MOTHER [*between her sobs*] Simone, Simone! . . . you have no heart, you have a stone in its place. . . . You can't even understand that if this innocent child leaves us . . . life for me will be empty and void . . . and there will be nothing for me to do but to follow him. . . .

THE FATHER. A stone in the place of a heart! Are you now trying to tell me I am a brute? . . . just because I haven't your disposition? because I feel things in my own way? . . . My nerves are sound. Here is the truth. I am a man like all others, who has to go through this life the best he can, eating, drinking and . . . made of flesh and blood. I was not made to groan for months at a time. I can understand a day given to tears. It's natural, it's right; and it's even necessary for those who understand. But more than that, no. If just because a child dies, those who loved him had to die of sorrow, this world would soon be at an end . . .

THE MOTHER. At least try to speak softly . . . don't let your words reach his ears. One never knows . . . children understand so many things. Remember he is dying. . . . Don't you feel the need of lowering your voice as in a church?

THE FATHER [*with an instinctive expression of dismay before the mystery of death*] You're right in that. When some one dies, one ought to speak softly. . . . Yes. Yes . . . we'd best go in the other room . . . This one seems to me like a tomb. . . . [*He looks about him with a frightened air*] Come. . . . Let's go and sleep over there. I am tired and you haven't closed an eye for two nights. We can't do anything here. Now everything is over, — it's a question of hours and there's nothing to be done. It's no use taking away from him the little air he breathes with so much pain, like a little fish out of water. . . . He may last for hours. . . . Come.

THE MOTHER [*in a heartrending voice*] No, I won't go, I won't. . . . Go and sleep if you're sleepy and tired. Go. . . . But nobody'll take me away from here, nobody will drag me away. . . . Tomorrow I'll do what you want me to do. I'll be like a rag in your hands. I'll be your slave . . . I'll carry your chain as I have done for

the past ten years. I'll obey, bow my head as your oxen do when they drag the plow. You'll order me about as you please. I am your wife and I am bound to you by a ring. You have the right to do with me as you please and it is my duty to say nothing, even when you come back home drunk and beat me. . . . If at times I have rebelled, I am sorry for it now. I beg you to forgive me and I promise that from now on I shall be what you wish me to be . . . without will of my own . . . But just now, I pray you, leave me alone with my baby . . . for this last night . . . It is the last and he needs his mamma. I shall never ask you for another favor as long as I live . . . never . . . till I die. But this favor I beg of you with clasped hands.

THE FATHER [*angrily*] As far as I can see you're quite crazy! . . . Yes, yes, stay alone if you wish to. . . . If my company is so distasteful to you, I'll go as far away as I can . . . [*He mumbles*] there are other women in this world . . . [*With an angry gesture he turns to the door, then moves suddenly as if to go to the sick child's crib. With a gesture of command the woman stands before him*]

THE MOTHER. What do you want? Don't dare go near his crib. You are filled with sin and you shan't touch him. . . . Your breath smells of wine and your hands . . .

Keep away. Here stands an angel watching over him and you've come from hell and slime —

THE FATHER [*with a bitter laugh*] Don't you understand, silly, that I want to get some money out of the desk. I've got to go out at dawn to settle a deal for some cattle . . .

THE MOTHER. Very well, take it . . . [*Hands him the key*] There, sell . . . buy . . . fill up your stables, take away the little that remains of my dowry to spend it on your excesses . . . but for the last time I pray you: keep still.

THE FATHER [*counting the money*] Yes, I'll go at once . . . I told you I would . . . I'm just counting . . . I'll have to be in the city all day tomorrow . . . [*Hesitating*] But . . . if he should die . . . you must think about the funeral. I want it done in good style, as becomes people of our standing. . . . A merchant having the credit I command can't have his child buried like a peasant. I want the village band and the children from the school . . .

THE MOTHER [*interrupts him with a moan*] Don't you understand, can't you feel that you're driving nails into my heart? Do you wish to kill me? Do you wish to torture me?

THE FATHER [*who has closed the desk and who goes towards door, stops short in the middle of the room and crosses his arms*] It's no use, we can't agree. . . . As if I were saying these things to make you suffer! Really, you're queer. Surely somebody's got to think of the practical things, of the funeral . . . It isn't because I lack feeling . . . after all, you must remember he is my son . . . Mine.

[*He goes out. The Mother moans shrilly as if her heart were broken and falls upon her knees beside the dying child's bed, shaken by her sobs. She weeps desperately, her face hidden between her hands. Gradually her sobs are less convulsive, she grows quieter. Then Angela, hidden in the depth of the chimney, and unnoticed till then, rises, and walking noiselessly, like a shadow, draws near The Mother and lays her hand softly upon her shoulder.*]

ANGELA. Don't cry so, poor dear.

THE MOTHER [*startled*] Angela . . . is it you? Did you remain? You haven't forsaken me like the others?

ANGELA. No, no, I shall never forsake you. I feel so sorry for you. More so than I feel for this innocent crea-

ture. It is no grief for him to leave this world, but for you, who remain behind, the cross will be heavy to bear. Only faith can make your burden lighter. Why don't you try to pray? You have appealed to men and they can do nothing for you. Men are weak, ignorant. Try to look towards Heaven.

THE MOTHER. Heaven? . . . Heaven?

[*She raises her head and seems to search for something above.*]

ANGELA. Your eyes are always looking down upon earth.

THE MOTHER. It's true. I was thinking of the grave where they would lay him.

ANGELA. When one looks down, everything becomes cold and gray . . . We must look upward where there is light and our kingdom.

THE MOTHER. Nobody has ever talked to me as you do . . .

ANGELA. You must trust in God, not in doctors. Men know nothing. They seek but know nothing. God alone knows all our sorrows.

THE MOTHER. Do you really think there is one who sees and listens to us? . . . One who loves us and opens

his arms to us when we can do no more . . . when we are tired of living? . . .

ANGELA. I believe it.

THE MOTHER. Do you believe there is a Father in Heaven?

ANGELA. Yes, yes, there is! Believe. Pray to him, too . . . And if he seems too high for our sorrows, for us poor women, pray to Mary . . .

THE MOTHER. Mary! [*She raises her eyes and sees the little statue of the Mother of Sorrows*] Mary . . . She was a mother! Perhaps she can understand another mother, because she saw Jesus hanging on the Cross . . . [*She stops, her bewildered eyes gazing far away*] Ah! I don't know how to pray. I haven't prayed for so long . . . I can hardly remember the prayers I was taught . . . But I know you are listening to me, Mary, though I speak to you like a poor woman. Perhaps you are not so far away from me . . . Perhaps you are present here . . . Perhaps you're there in the shadow beside the bed, beside my dying child. You are here with his guardian angel, with all the angels . . . You are here . . . Listen to me. Save my baby. He is mine, as Christ was yours . . . I don't know how to ask. But I weep before you, at the foot of this

crib as you once wept at the foot of His Cross . . . You who heard Jesus groan for very thirst, you who could not give Him a drop of water to quench His thirst or speak a word to comfort Him — you can understand me . . . Behold me before you as if it were Mount Calvary and I ask this grace as if your dying Son were here . . . Yes, this is my Mount Calvary! And you weep with me . . . Now you are looking at me . . . you pity me . . . Yes, yes, grant me my plea. Men cannot save him, but you can, because you are near God.

ANGELA [*who has listened with brimming eyes to the woman's prayer*] Now you have found your faith again, poor dear. It was always there, hidden in your heart, like a stream of water under the stones and sand. Now you see what I can not see . . . I who have always had faith. And you pray as I have never prayed . . . I who morning and night repeat the Angelus and pray with my lips only . . . Yours is the faith that saves and makes possible miracles.

THE MOTHER [*with a start*] Angela, who said so? Do you really believe in miracles?

ANGELA. Christ said so.

THE MOTHER. If Christ said so, it must be so . . . Christ could not deceive us. He, our only hope.

ANGELA. One day He said to the crowd following Him: "With faith ye can move mountains."

THE MOTHER. If He said so . . . we can move them. Not with our hands . . . but how? . . . We are so weak . . .

ANGELA. It is enough to believe.

THE MOTHER. Then we ought to be able to snatch a beloved child from the jaws of death . . .

ANGELA. It is enough to believe.

THE MOTHER. . . . and save this child, my baby?

ANGELA. Yes, yes, that, too . . . that, too, can be done if you have faith, if you do not doubt, cast your burden upon the Lord . . .

THE MOTHER [*remains a long while in concentration as if looking for a long forgotten belief; then with closed eyes she raises her head*] I believe. [*A long pause*]

ANGELA. He who has faith can knock at the gates of Heaven to obtain a favor . . . But faith is not enough, one must sacrifice. You must make a vow . . .

THE MOTHER. A vow? . . . Teach me how to make it? . . .

ANGELA. Yes . . . You must promise the Virgin the thing that is dearest to you, the most precious thing in the world. Promise it with the belief that there is One who can do all things for us poor mortals, lost on this earth and stumbling about like creatures bereft of sight . . . I have seen it happen: I have known people to knock at the gates of Heaven so, and the gates were opened . . .

THE MOTHER. O Virgin! Mother! . . . I have but little, but I give it to you . . . I have a ring . . . the earrings worn on my wedding day . . . I have a necklace of garnets left me by my poor mother. I will bring it to you to the Chapel of the Miracles with my child when he is strong again. I shall make a vestment of my only silk dress.

ANGELA. That is not enough. Those are not the things you must promise. And then you can not make a vow in this fashion. It must be made with clasped hands, lighted tapers . . . because it is a terrible thing. Think of it: it is a promise made for eternity . . . it is a pact from which no earthly force can release you . . .

THE MOTHER. It is true. It is a terrible thing . . . It is forever. [*Slight pause as if she were hesitating*] Light the candles.

[*Angela brings two rough brass candle sticks and lights the candles before the statue of the Madonna, with a simple gesture, expressing her humble faith.*]

ANGELA. Now I'll leave you alone . . . these things must be done in secret with God.

[*She goes out. The first rays of dawn begin to slant between the closed shutters.*]

THE MOTHER [*stands near the crib, her hand on the heart of her sick child. Her eyes are riveted upon the sacred image as if on a person actually present*] Yes, he still lives . . . [*She listens*] . . . What have I to offer to save him? I am not rich, you can see that for yourself . . . Even my little dowry has been taken, you know it . . . But you can have the little gold I have hidden, down to the last coin . . . I'll lay it upon your altar. I had meant to save it for him so he could find something when he grew up. Now I am giving it to you to save his life. Is it enough . . . [*She stands as if waiting for an answer spoken by an inner voice that seems to come from the very depths of her conscience*] — It is not enough. Not enough. Not enough? Not enough? . . . Yes, it's true, it can not be enough. Gold is not enough . . . It can not compensate for the gift I crave. You desire an-

other sort of sacrifice. I think I begin to understand . . . Well, then . . . I promise that every year, on this very day, I shall crawl upon my knees, dressed in sackcloth, up the stony pathway of the Mount of the Crosses, to the little Chapel of the Miracles, and light a lamp before your altar . . . Every year, on this day, under the burning sun, under the rain, up to the day of my death. I have promised. Accept . . . [*She seems disturbed during a long pause. Then she repeats*] — Not enough, not enough, not enough. Then what have I left? What do you wish? . . . I have but this body . . . do you demand my life? Take it, take it; take my flesh and torture it with every pain imaginable; so that my child may open its eyes and look at me again, so that he may open his lips and call me "mamma." Take my life! Accept it, I have naught else to offer . . . [*A long pause. She stands as if listening to the inner voice and repeats to herself*] — Not enough, not enough, not enough. — How is it possible that it can't be enough? [*At that moment it seems to her as if the child's heart had ceased beating*] God . . . God . . . it is over! No. No . . . If I could, I would tear my very heart with these two hands! [*She is frightened at her own words*] My heart! Tear my heart? It's never been

done . . . ——— Yes, yes, yes. — Who speaks to me? . . . Where does this voice come from? [*She listens, trembling with fear. Then she repeats to herself, with her own voice, though in a different tone, in an ecstasy of passion, the words spoken by the invisible mouth*] ——— Yes, yes, yes . . . you have something else . . . the most precious thing. Why try to hide it in the depths of your heart? I can see it . . . I shan't speak its name, but you know it . . . When he comes up the road, you recognize his step far away. In the midst of a crowd you find his eye riveted upon you. If he is near you, even though it be night, the world seems to you filled with light and joy. If he is far away, the day seems to you gray and drab . . . If you meet him, in the fields, alone, you tremble with fear and happiness. If you hear him speak with another woman, behind the hedge, you moan softly . . . Because he is the only thing that is yours in this world . . . your hidden treasure, that no one can take away from you . . . Ah, you tried to hide it, to stifle it within, not to give it away . . . you tried to . . . because it is your love, your only love . . . the last love . . . love. That is the only thing you care for, so you must lay it on the scale of Life and Death. — [*Her mystic delirium in-*

creases and she bursts into tears] — Give it up entirely if you desire your favor. Give it up and look not behind. Extinguish the fire within you . . . Tear your heart with both your hands . . . No longer go to the door, at night, when your husband is away. No more must you stand at your window, fearing to see him with another upon his arm . . . No more must you speak with him while the child sleeps . . . You must not seek him . . . You must not look at him as he laughs with flashing teeth . . . Cease to think of him . . . forever. — [*The Woman seems to come out of her ecstasy and again becomes conscious, with her own voice*] Ah! This is the vow? This . . . forever . . . for eternity . . . Never again . . . never . . . never . . . [*Her face betrays the conflict raging within her breast, then a groan from the sick child brings her back to consciousness. She raises her arms to Heaven, and murmurs*] Forever . . . Thy will be done. [*Long pause*]

THE CHILD. Mamma, mamma . . .

THE MOTHER [*startled, bends over the child*] . . . His eyes are open. Yes, they are open. He looks at me. He moves. He speaks . . . he lives. [*She calls loudly*] Angela! Angela! . . . the miracle.

[*Angela enters, transfigured with joy, and rushes to the window to open the shutters. The morning light floods the room. Bells in the valley are ringing the Angelus.*]

ANGELA [*stretching out her arms against the luminous background of the open window*] The Lord be praised!

CURTAIN

ACT TWO.

"THE MOUNT OF THE CROSSES."

SCENE.

TIME: *Twenty-three years later.*

SCENE: *On the slopes of the Mount of the Crosses, so called by the people because of the rude wooden crosses marking the stations of Mt. Calvary for the faithful who climb up from the valley to the sanctuary of the Madonna of the Miracles. A little church and a few houses — once a convent and asylums outlined against the sky, crown the mountain, gray with olive groves.*

The action begins to develop on a stony promontory, at the foot of two century old olive trees, one of which, dead, rotted by time, leans toward the other stretching naked, suppliant branches.

A large path, excavated in the clay soil, winds its way, between the roots of the two olive trees up to a grassy knoll redolent with the freshness of fields in springtime.

At the foot of the dead tree, on a rough-hewn stone sit two beggars.

THE CRIPPLE. It's years since we've done so poor a business. [*Counts a few pennies.*]

THE BLIND ONE [*feeling the money in his companion's hand*] How much do I get?

THE CRIPPLE. Little, very little. Not enough to keep us from starving to death till tomorrow morning.

THE BLIND ONE. We'll have to leave this place. This village has been plague-struck. Nobody gives alms any more, and up at the Chapel of the Miracles they sometimes wait for days for a pilgrim.

THE CRIPPLE. In days gone by we'd have come down with bulging pockets.

THE BLIND ONE. In those days people had faith . . . I remember when the Shelter was kept by the Brothers, only the devout would come; now they have made a brothel of the place.

THE CRIPPLE. The wine there is good and the landlady fond of fun; that's enough to attract all the youth of the surrounding villages.

THE BLIND ONE. The world is made so. What can we do about it? People say the world is getting better; it seems to me it's getting worse. But it's no use getting angry about it; — getting angry won't give me back my sight nor will it add an inch to your leg.

THE CRIPPLE. You're easily comforted; perhaps because you're blind. Lucky for you that you didn't see how they laughed at our rags.

THE BLIND ONE. What I didn't see I heard. One of them even kicked me.

THE CRIPPLE. They chased us away as if we were mangy dogs just because we annoyed the prostitutes trailing behind.

THE BLIND ONE. It's a shame! In other days these women weren't permitted to set foot on this slope.

THE CRIPPLE. You're away behind the times. The world is moving. Today it is honest women who have to keep in hiding.

THE BLIND ONE [*listens to a rhythmic sound in the distance*] Hear? . . . Somebody's coming up. If only it were some rich pilgrim . . . They sometimes come this way.

THE CRIPPLE. Not very often. [*He looks attentively down the road, against the light*] I told you so . . . she's

a beggar like ourselves . . . [*Looks again*] Now I recognize her. It's the same old woman dressed in sackcloth who climbs here once a year for a vow she made . . . for the recovery of a sick child . . .

[*The Mother appears. She is very much bent. She wear a brown dress not unlike a nun's habit. She appears worn from her long walk.*]

THE MOTHER. May God save you.

[*She sits upon a stone, exhausted.*]

THE CRIPPLE. You are as punctual as a clock, good woman. This must be the twenty-third time we meet on this same day on the road to the Sanctuary.

THE MOTHER. Twenty-three years? . . . I can't remember when I met you for the first time . . . Things are confused in my brain because I've grown old and the brain is weak at my age. I didn't recollect that the climb was so hard . . . But your memory is fresher than mine, and if you say it is twenty-three years, then twenty-three it must be.

THE CRIPPLE. Things have gone badly on this Mount since you climbed up here for the first time.

THE BLIND ONE. Then only the faithful who had

crosses to bear came up here to pray . . . Today they have made of it a rendezvous for the idle . . .

THE CRIPPLE. You'll see . . . you'll see what sort of lay sisters go up there to do business! Painted women that any passer-by can have for four cents . . .

THE BLIND ONE. They could choose from all the inns in the world; but no! you'd think they couldn't dance and do their foolish things anywhere but in this old Asylum.

THE MOTHER. You must have pity on them . . . they laugh to-day. But the shadow of a cross will fall on them, too, some day . . . Sooner or later it falls upon all men . . . it falls upon all the world . . .

THE BLIND ONE. Fine words, but in the meantime our guts turn for very hunger! The fine people of this village are so kind they give bread to their dogs and to us — kicks . . .

THE MOTHER. Why didn't you say so at once? I can give you something . . . It's little, I know . . . [*She fumbles in a pocket*] Here's a little money, enough to live . . . and then I have some bread . . . [*She fumbles in another pocket*] Here . . . I've had enough for today. . . . I don't need any more.

THE CRIPPLE [*takes the bread and the money*] You, you're a kind hearted woman . . .

THE BLIND ONE. I'm almost ashamed to eat this bread . . . how can we repay you for your kindness?

THE MOTHER. Pray for me . . .

THE CRIPPLE. May the Lord repay you a hundredfold.

THE MOTHER. This is not what I seek. . . .

[*She remains absorbed in deep thought. Steps are heard hurrying down.*]

THE BLIND ONE. Who is it? Perhaps one of those villains?

THE CRIPPLE. No . . . it's another ugly animal. . . . Let's get down quickly . . . Good-bye, old woman . . . thanks.

THE BLIND ONE. God give you peace!

THE MOTHER [*listening to the steps coming nearer, murmurs*] Another who'll wish to talk . . . how tiresome it is to live in a world where every one is always talking. . . .

[*A man appears; he is about sixty, strong-limbed, ruddy-faced, dressed in faded, old-fashioned clothes, with a high hat much too large for him, pushed down to his very ears.*

He carries a red umbrella under his arm and a leather bag is slung across his shoulder.]

THE VETERINARY. Good-day! It's been a long time since I've had the pleasure of meeting you. I recognized you at once. Do you remember me?

THE MOTHER. No. I don't seem to recognize anyone any more. It's not my fault, though . . . old age is like a sponge that wipes out all the memories within one's brain . . . except a few . . . these will be with me to the end.

THE VETERINARY. Perhaps it isn't the fault of your memory alone. You see, I've been away for a long time. I am Andreotto, the veterinary, your husband's friend. Now I'm sure you remember me . . . we used to run around together, and for that reason you didn't like me and used to preach to me . . . do you remember?

THE MOTHER. Ah! I think so . . . one who talked a good deal. . . .

THE VETERINARY. My tongue hasn't grown old . . . it would be awful if I couldn't talk. Words gurgle in my throat like a stream of water that can find no outlet.

THE MOTHER. And where have you been all these years?

THE VETERINARY. Don't you know? Don't you re-

member? . . . Indeed you've lost your memory . . . all the papers spoke of the killing and I rid the village of an ugly mug.

THE MOTHER [*with anguish*] What? . . . you killed a man and speak of it so lightly? . . .

THE VETERINARY. Let's get this straight. I am not a murderer. I quarreled with the man at the inn and the knife went a little too deep . . . Don't look at me in that frightened way as if my hands were still bathed in blood . . . Now I've made my peace with God . . . and I've married, too . . . Do you remember the serving maid at the inn of the Red Deer? . . . That's the one.

THE MOTHER. You did well.

THE VETERINARY. Now I'm the peace-loving father of a family and I've taken up my old trade again. I go from stable to stable curing sick cows . . . I also act as go-between. That's why your husband and I were such good friends . . . When I got out of prison I learned he had died, poor fellow! They used to say in the village that you didn't get along well together . . . but you can accept my sympathy just the same. He was a good fellow, after all, full of fun and glad to be alive. . . . By the way, I was glad to see your son. . . .

THE MOTHER [*surprised*] My son? . . .

THE VETERINARY. Why are you so surprised?

THE MOTHER. But where? . . . where could you see him? You? . . .

THE VETERINARY. I saw him up at the Sanctuary. There's nothing so strange about it. I had gone up to collect some money owed me and while I was having a glass of wine with the host, they showed me a fine looking young man, blond, in very . . . gay company. [*He laughs wickedly*] Somebody said to me: "He's the son of Simone, the cattle dealer, the one who lived near the crossroads." Good blood never lies, thought I, because your husband, too, used to like certain ladies and . . .

THE MOTHER. My son? . . . my son is not here. It's many years ago that he left me and went to work in America. If he had come back he would have let his old mother know. . . . I'm sure of that. He's a little lightheaded, I know, but all young men are like that. But his heart is good. . . . I know his heart. And he couldn't have come back to his own country and not knock at our door to see if I were dead or alive. . . .

THE VETERINARY. And yet I know I'm not mistaken.

THE MOTHER. It can't be . . . they've mistaken him

for another person, that's all. He was but a boy when he left. . . . Nobody can remember him very well. I alone could recognize him. . . . But the boy you saw is not he. . . . I assure you he's not.

THE VETERINARY. You're free to insist. But I must tell you the truth. . . . They told me he returned from America a few weeks ago, and now he's playing the fine gentleman with Onorio, the druggist, and that devil Luca, the baker's son. They called three girls from the city, and they're emptying his pockets for him. I'm not saying all this to speak ill of him. Heaven keep me from it! When you're young, the Evil One puts temptations in the way, and who can avoid him? But truth is truth and if I were to keep it from you, why you might come face to face with him in bad company. . . .

THE MOTHER. I don't believe it. . . . It's all a mistake. . . . To believe it I'd have to see, with my own eyes, a scar he bears right here. . . . [*She points to her right eyebrow*] He got that when he was about four years old, he fell down as he ran to meet me.

THE VETERINARY. There is a sign that's surer than a scar.

THE MOTHER. What sign? . . .

THE VETERINARY. His resemblance to his father.

THE MOTHER. To his father? Why, when he went away, they all said he looked so much like me.

THE VETERINARY. That means nothing. Certain resemblances show themselves late. They come with age, just as mushrooms come up from the ground with the rain.

THE MOTHER. But my son is handsome . . . blond . . . he looks like my people. . . .

THE VETERINARY. Your husband, too, was handsome when he was young. Man is made so; at twenty he looks like a reed, then around forty he fills out, defects stand out, his nose reddens, his hair falls out and his belly begins to swell. . . . But I can assure you, I who knew your husband long before he married you, that a glance at your son is enough. . . . He's just like his father.

THE MOTHER [*with a gesture of anguish as if her husband's shadow stood suddenly before her*] Perhaps it's true . . . perhaps I didn't remember. . . . I was trying to deceive myself . . . to say no with my lips. But it's true, it's true. . . . Now I remember how his eyes looked when he was a little boy . . . they were clear, clear, limpid as the water in the fountain. . . . Then one day he looked at me and his eyes had changed. From the very depths

something had come that was not mine. . . . And his voice, too . . . it was different. . . .

[*Voices and bursts of laughter are heard from above, accompanied by the sound of a guitar. Someone is heard singing a popular song.*]

Voice in Distance.

First Verse

I've gathered a nosegay of tender young lasses.
My sweetheart comes first, before all the rest.
She is white as flour, her mouth's like a blossom,
Firing with passion whoe'er steals a kiss.

The Veterinary. Don't you hear? It's he singing. . . .

The Mother [*turning towards the voice*] It's he . . . yes, yes. . . . It's he. . . . It is his voice. . . .

The Veterinary. Now that you're persuaded, it is better that you hurry down with me. Listen to me. . . . I'm saying it for your good. When a young man is in bad company is not the best time for a meeting.

The Mother [*loosening her arm from the man's grasp*] No, no. . . . You go down. . . . Leave me here alone. I want to see him once again. . . . I am his mother

[*The Veterinary leaves her, shaking his head. The*

Woman leans against the stone between the roots of the dead tree in order not to be seen by the group of people coming. The voices and the song are coming nearer and become more distinct.]

Second Verse

I picked me a rambler, a rose called Alvina,
In the morning a flower, at twilight a thorn.
Her love it is fleeting and roams like the swallow —
Today in her nest, the next on the wing.

[*The group is seen in the field overlooking the road. It is composed of three women and three young men, one of whom plays the guitar. The three women, one a brunette, one with flaming hair, and the other a blond, are dressed in bright colors, giving the impression of bright daubs against the green field. The men are dressed with rustic elegance. One of them stands out by his manly beauty. It is The Son. His arm is around the waist of the dark girl, Alvina. The Mother, unseen, follows the dialog with eyes heavy with sorrow.*]

The Son. There! let's sit down. This beautiful green field was made for us to lie on. . . .

Alvina. Yes, yes. Let's stop here . . . Gemma . . .

Marina. . . . [*She lies down beside the young man*] Let's lie down. . . .

Luca [*ceases playing on the guitar*] What's that? Tired already? Why, we haven't walked more than a quarter of an hour!

Onorio. That doesn't matter. The Pasha orders it and we must obey because he's the one who pays.

Gemma. Then there's no use hurrying home. . . .

Marina. No one is waiting for us. If you'd like to, we can all spend the night together.

Alvina. I want to enjoy my day to the last moment. I am like the cicada —

The Son. Eh! I know you. . . .

Alvina. When the day's over, is the time I like it best. . . .

The Son. You never have enough sunshine and pleasure.

Alvina. Never! The more I enjoy, the more I want. I'm always ready to begin all over again.

The Son. We'll begin again tomorrow. . . .

Luca [*laughing stupidly*] What? What do we do tomorrow?

The Son. Eh! we know: eat, drink, make love; go

about the world; live like fat animals, in fact. . . . [*He lies supine on the grass*] Ah! this is the life for me. I should have been born an animal, with four legs. . . . I am so happy when I can lie on the grass without a thought in my head. [*He pulls out a handful of grass and rubs it over Alvina's face*]

ALVINA [*laughing*] Now he takes me for a mare at pasture.

THE SON. When I'm stretched out so on the grass, I feel as if I were half a horse myself. I feel spring like a young colt. . . . [*He pretends to neigh*] And then the smell of the pampas. . . .

GEMMA. Have you been in the Pampas?

THE SON. Didn't you know it? I've been in all the countries of the world . . . here, there . . . where it's hot, where it's cold. I've seen men of all colors; white, black, red, yellow. . . . I've tried my hand at all sorts of work because I never stay very long at one job. I'm always changing. . . . I need room in which to breathe.

LUCA. That must be a wonderful life!

THE SON. The life of a healthy man, free, always galloping, with fine grass up to here. . . . [*He touches his chest with his hand*] . . . with grass everywhere . .

grass, grass, grass and sunshine. . . . If I had to regret anything, it would be the fact that I was not born a horse. One's happier in the world of quadrupeds than in the world of men. It's while I was living that life over there that I felt the beast within me coming to light.

ONORIO. And that's where you learned to loaf about like an animal.

THE SON. I told you what's what: idleness is our element, as water is to a fish. I'd like to stay this way for days doing nothing . . . look at the sky and caress Alvina. . . .

GEMMA. Ah! you know how to enjoy your youth!

THE SON. I enjoy it as I would a ripe fruit. It makes me happy to be on this earth, to warm myself in the sun . . . [*He stretches lazily with arms extended*] to stretch this way . . . to bite a flower . . . a leaf . . . and then to stretch out my hand and feel something a little more substantial . . . a little softer . . . alive. [*He stretches out his arms as if to embrace Gemma and Marina.*]

ONORIO. Down with your hands! Don't touch other people's property!

LUCA. You have hardly enough with three.

ONORIO. You're worse than a Sultan.

THE SON. What can you do about it? I like women more than anything else on earth. . . . I love them all . . . every one of them as long as they're not hump-backed or cross-eyed.

ONORIO. You ugly brute! You might at least teach us how to win them.

THE SON. That is an art that cannot be taught. One's born a hunter just as you were born a druggist. Every one of us has his star. I always come back home with full hands when I start out on this sort of a hunt. . . . Ah! ah! ah! [*He laughs*] And then even if I had a secret I wouldn't let you in on it. But if you want my advice, here it is: treat them rough. Women like to feel our claws. See, I handle them as I would this handkerchief . . . [*Twists it into a knot*] when it's all tangled up — away with it . . . who'll take the handkerchief? . . . [*He throws it to Luca*] and I think no more about it.

ALVINA. I knew you couldn't love anybody. You have no heart.

THE SON. That's why you like me and why I'm always happy.

GEMMA. Almost too happy!

THE SON. I was born that way; with a devil in my

finger, another in my head, and a big one in my blood and this one upsets me so that I feel at times as if I were fermenting like wine. I inherited that from my father.

ONORIO. Your father, too, was fond of skirts.

THE SON. Women and wine! He used to say that for these two things it was worth while selling one's holdings in the next world. He was right. We live but once. I follow his path and the good examples he left me. . . . My mother always wanted to make a good Christian of me . . . [*Laughs*] but she had to give it up, poor thing, because I couldn't get these fables into my noddle. . . . I have my code of morals but it's different from hers. It's very simple: When something pleases me I defy all the hells and take it. Like this . . .

[*He embraces Alvina. Down below, The Mother who has listened to this discourse with ever-increasing anguish covers her face with her hands and moans.*]

THE MOTHER. Ah! . . . ah! . . . [*Luca leans over curiously and discovers the woman*] Say! look there: a witch.

MARINA [*coming down front to see*] It's a mad-woman.

[*The others leave The Son and Alvina, who remain lying*

on the grass; they come to the edge of the meadow and look curiously.]

ALVINA. What's so interesting down there?

LUCA. One of those religious women who climb up to the Sanctuary on their knees.

THE SON. If they tore down this church a lot of people would recover their sanity. . . .

LUCA. Here, old woman, take this to do penance! [*He throws a handful of dirt at her*]

GEMMA. Leave her alone; she's not harming anybody.

MARINA. I'd like to know for what sins of her youth she now does penance by dragging herself up on the stones of this mountain.

GEMMA. You're right; let's ask her. . . . Old woman?

MARINA. Saint? . . .

GEMMA. What is your name?

MARINA. Won't you deign to answer us?

[*The Mother raises her sad face — and looks at the two women for a long time with anguish.*]

GEMMA. Did we disturb you in your prayers? . . .

ONORIO. Maybe she won't even talk to you, children of the Evil One.

ALVINA [*leaves The Son and comes to the edge of the*

meadow] Yes . . . I suppose in your eyes we are three women sold to the Devil who'll end in Hell.

THE MOTHER. No, no, don't say that. . . . It's I who need your pity.

GEMMA. Go on . . . you can't be a bad woman.

MARINA. Perhaps thirty years ago she did what we are doing to-day. Perhaps then she spent her time with handsome lads and in good times!

GEMMA. How many did you have by your side, eh? How many when you were a blond? . . .

MARINA. Surely more than the prayers you now have in your mouth.

THE MOTHER. What are you saying? . . . I. . . . A poor mother?

MARINA. Now she'd like to have us believe that she didn't enjoy life when she was twenty!

GEMMA. Then, if you're not doing penance for some wrong-doing, why do you drag yourself over the stones looking for all the world like a poor crucified one bathed in sweat and blood?

THE MOTHER [*in a grave tone*] I made a promise.

MARINA. Who did you make it to?

GEMMA. Tell us. . . .

THE MOTHER [*speaking wearily*] It's a promise I made, a vow . . . many years ago . . . many, because I had a sick baby who was dying. . . .

[*Her voice is broken with sobs and she hides her face within her hands. Just then, The Son who was lying supine on the grass raises himself and listens, astounded to hear his mother's voice, whom he does not see.*]

GEMMA. Quick, quick, tell us. . . .

ALVINA. Don't make us pull every word out of your mouth.

THE MOTHER [*trying to silence her sobs*] He was dying . . . there was no more hope, so I turned to Our Mother above. . . . And to save him I offered to give up all I had; my gold, silk . . . and something else, too. . . . For his sake, I'd have torn my heart in pieces! . . . And he was cured.

ONORIO [*with a sarcastic smile*] Do you really believe he was cured on account of that?

THE MOTHER. Yes, yes, I know it.

[*Luca and the three women burst into loud laughter, all the while commenting sarcastically.*]

THE MOTHER. You laugh at me. . . . I know I'm but an ignorant old woman. I don't know how to talk. . . .

I don't . . . you're right . . . I don't know how to explain. But if you were mothers you'd understand — ah! you wouldn't laugh because you, too, would have faith. . . . All mothers have faith and they understand one another . . . all of them. If you had borne a child within you and then had nourished it with your blood, your milk and your soul; then you'd understand and have pity upon the poor old woman dragging her weary body upon the stones of this Calvary! . . . No, you would not laugh. . . . You'd understand that in my heart it is as if the years had not gone by . . . as if I still had my sick baby with me, my innocent, pure baby and I were carrying him for the first time upon this mount to laud Mary. . . . [*She remains lost in a far-off vision.*]

GEMMA [*who no longer laughs*] You must have loved your child very much. . . .

THE MOTHER. Ah! . . . so much. . . .

ALVINA. And what became of him? Where is he?

THE MOTHER [*disturbed by the question answers with infinite sadness*] He is far away. . . .

ONORIO. And he leaves you so, in rags, begging your way?

MARINA. See how grateful he is to you for giving him life!

THE MOTHER. But it is not his fault if I am reduced to this . . . he is far away. . . . He does not know. But he's coming back. I am awaiting him. I hope he will not be too late. . . . Now let me go in peace with God. I can not say any more . . . I can not.

ONORIO. You can go wherever you please!

GEMMA. It's no use tormenting her any longer.

MARINA. Each one takes his happiness where he finds it.

ONORIO. Hers is beyond the clouds. . . . [*He laughs in a commiserating tone.*]

ALVINA [*goes back to The Son and lays her head upon his shoulder*] For us it's here! Our happiness is this. . . . [*She kisses him upon the lips*] But you . . . always laughing and talking, what's the matter? What are you thinking of? Why so quiet?

THE SON [*removes Alvina's arm from around his neck and tries to avoid her inquisitive gaze*] Boys and girls, it's getting late. . . . It's time to go. . . . [*He stands upon his feet.*]

ONORIO. Let's go. I must be home before dark. [*He takes Gemma by the arm and precedes the others.*]

LUCA. You're like a lot of crazy goats. I'll be the shepherd dog . . . bow, bow. . . .

[*He pretends to bite Marina's arm as he helps her descend. The Son and Alvina remain behind. Alvina puts her arm lovingly around his neck and they descend from the grassy knoll. The Son goes down the steep pathway trying to avoid his mother's gaze. As she sees him leave her, perhaps for ever, The Mother cannot hold back a cry.*]

THE MOTHER. Giovanni!

ALVINA [*to the young man who has stopped short*] Who's this old beggar who calls you by your first name as if she were your mother?

THE SON [*pushing her away angrily*] Go away. Join the others. Obey. Go. . . . Leave me alone. . . .

[*The girl, amazed, goes off quietly. Voices are heard whispering. A long pause — Mother and Son are face to face.*]

THE MOTHER. Giovanni . . . don't you recognize me?

THE SON. Yes, I recognize you. . . .

THE MOTHER. And you were going away, so . . . with not even a word . . . without a look for your poor old mother?

THE SON. You said so yourself: we are far apart. . . .

And then. . . . I'm ashamed to meet you for the first time, after all these years, dressed like a beggar. My father was not a beggar, and I won't have the people of the village laugh at us . . . at our family.

THE MOTHER. Forgive me. I know I should not have called you, that you would be ashamed of me . . . your mother. So I tried to stifle my voice, to clench my teeth not to utter your name. But when I saw you turn your back on me and thought you were going away for ever . . . far away . . . that perhaps my eyes would never rest on you again in this life . . . never . . . that perhaps this was the last time you would pass me by, ah! I could not stand it any more. I did not have the strength to hold back that cry. . . .

THE SON. A nice thing you did for me! . . . I might as well have let them believe me a bastard picked up on the roadway. And now they'll say I am an unnatural son whose mother goes about dressed like a beggar; that on account of me you have to stretch your hand to passers-by. If you needed money you might have let me know. . . .

THE MOTHER. No, no, no . . . I don't need your money. I had hoped for something else from you. . . . I hoped. . . . All my heart was set on seeing you again, on

hearing your voice again, on hearing you call me "mamma" as you did so long ago when you were sick and I would sing to you to stop your tears. Do you remember? When I used to make little paper boats we sailed in the wash-basin? Then you loved me! But afterwards you changed toward me and you went out into the world. . . . I have known nothing of you for so long. . . . You stopped writing . . . and how I waited for news . . . every night when the postman made his round and knocked at all the village doors except mine, I would weep in secret. . . . [*She weeps*] . . . and you came back without a word to me . . . as if I were already under ground. . . .

The Son. It's impossible to change one's heart . . . I was not made for tears. It's not my fault if I was born with that need to live among joyous people, never to let sadness come near me . . . and then . . . I must tell you the truth . . . I was not comfortable in the home after my father died. . . . You've always lived among the clouds, did not want to touch earth. . . . And that's why things went wrong with us. You've wasted the little we had. . . . Even the money my father had put aside for me was wasted on the church. You even had to sell the copper kettles from the kitchen and the walnut furniture of my

folks in order to live. . . . If I'd come to see you I wouldn't have found a chair to sit on. . . .

THE MOTHER. Perhaps you're right. . . . I'm a poor, foolish old woman. All things go wrong for me. It's true . . . true . . . my house to-day is the poorest in the countryside. But if you had stayed with me, if you had learned a trade here, if you had found a nice, decent girl to marry you — one who could have done the things I didn't know how to do . . . one who'd have spun your linen, raised your vegetables and given you children: . . . then our house would not be the ruin it is today . . . so sad, so empty it frightens even me.

THE SON. Ah! Mother . . . it is not only because our house was cold and empty that I went away. . . . The reasons are many . . . there are other reasons. And perhaps you'll find them yourself if you search your past a little. . . .

THE MOTHER. I? My past . . . ? What do you mean?

THE SON. . . . That to understand why I have behaved as I did . . . why I went away from you . . . you'd better think about yourself . . . your youth . . . of my father.

THE MOTHER. Why do you speak to me so? . . . why

do you look at me that way? Why is your mouth so bitter . . . ?

THE SON. Because I remember what you perhaps have forgotten. . . . Things that happened long ago, it's true, but things that have never left my mind and stand today between you and me forever. . . . These things have made me suffer. . . . Today, fortunately, they affect me no longer. It's as if some one had put a stone where I once had a heart. The little sentiment I had I have lost. . . . But then . . . before I went away I did suffer. . . .

THE MOTHER [*miserably*] What could I have done to make you suffer? I . . . your mother? Who have given everything for you . . . even more than my blood. What wrong can I have done . . . tell me . . . tell me . . . speak!

THE SON [*hesitates before the mother's plea*] It would not be wrong for me . . . I know no laws. But it was wrong for you . . . a sin.

THE MOTHER. A sin? Isn't my life before you and God? . . . dull, grey. . . . [*She seems to look inwardly into the drabness of her memories.*]

THE SON. Ah! why do you make me think of the past . . . of the sad days? I was going my way, singing and

laughing, thinking I had forgotten everything! And you had to come and bring these memories back to life, drag them out of my mouth with your tears. . . . Very well, then, I can't keep it any longer. There is a knot here that must be untied. . . . It's this: you never loved father. . . . No, you never loved him. . . . You loved another who was not your husband. . . .

THE MOTHER. Another? Another? [*Frightened and trembling as if she had seen a phantom*] But how? How? . . . who could have told you . . . ? Who could have poisoned your heart against your mother? not knowing . . . the truth? Who?

THE SON. Eh! It wasn't one who told me. Everybody in the village spoke of it . . . they used to laugh, too. . . . And that's what has made me suffer; to be on everybody's lips. . . ! And then I remember things of my childhood, that I had not understood. . . . When one's a child . . . around seven years old . . . one sees many things . . . more than you think. One pretends to sleep but the eyes alone are closed, the ears are wide open and listen to all the noises, all the steps, all the words . . . in the dark. . . .

THE MOTHER. Well, what did you see? . . . what did you hear? . . . what can you remember of me?

THE SON. Well, mother . . . I remember you used to go down into the cellar . . . at night . . . I remember you used to stay for hours waiting on the balcony. . . . And I used to wait for you in my little bed, turning this way and that, trying to understand what you were doing. . . .

THE MOTHER. Why didn't you call me, then? Why didn't you tell me then?

THE SON. At times I went to you and you didn't see me. You used to look . . . look . . . up the moonlit road . . . weeping. . . .

THE MOTHER. Yes, I did weep. . . .

THE SON. And I saw the shadow of a man pass by. . . .

THE MOTHER. Only a shadow . . . that was before you were healed. . . .

THE SON. . . . And I remember his voice in the stillness of the night. He would always sing under our windows. And you'd follow him with strained eyes that I'll never forget.

THE MOTHER [*with a moan*] Yes . . . my eyes did follow him . . . but you don't know the truth . . . there

is One who knows . . . but He is up there and does not speak. . . .

THE SON. Surely you won't deny what I have seen with my own eyes. It's engraved there! [*He strikes his forehead with his hand.*]

THE MOTHER [*in despair, and with a gaze suggestive of madness*] Well, then? if you saw . . . if you don't believe me any more . . . I can't explain things any more . . . I can not . . . It must be as you say. [*She hides her face between her hands and remains stricken under the weight of human injustice.*]

THE SON. There! you've confessed it yourself; now you'll understand many things. . . . Now you won't bewail your fate if I go about the world . . . with the others. . . . Because between you and me stands my father.

[*The Mother raises her arms and sways them in an effort to deny the accusation, but she remains voiceless under the weight of her sorrow.*]

THE MOTHER. No. . . . No, no, no. . . . [*Once again she hides her face between her hands, while voices are heard calling the son.*]

ALVINA. Giovanni. . . . Giovanni! We're waiting for you. What are you doing? Do you hear me? Come . . . !

OTHER VOICES. Come with us! Come! It is late. The sun is setting. We have to go down.

[*The Son remains undecided for a few moments, then, won by the insistent voices, he goes down the path, almost running away from his mother. The Mother does not move any more. She does not weep. She seems petrified. Voices are heard, the strum-strum of a guitar, receding steps. When everything is quiet, she uncovers her face and transfigured with sorrow, she moans.*]

THE MOTHER. My God! . . . My God! . . . why hast thou forsaken me? . . .

CURTAIN

ACT THREE.

"THE CHAPEL OF THE MIRACLES."

SCENE.

The interior of a little Sanctuary, old fashioned, bare, low ceilinged, poorly lighted by two little windows now letting in the last rays of the dying sun. Two arches supported by granite Roman columns separate the Chapel of the Madonna of the Miracles from the central nave of the poor little church — a bare little church possessing two rude walnut benches and a few worn and broken rush-bottomed chairs. It is dark in the chapel but for the trembling lights of a few votive candles whose glow, falling upon the altar, illuminates a wooden group representing the Descent from the Cross and the tokens of the humble faithful; little pictures, wooden carved figures, silver hearts, decorate the walls. Two brass oil lamps are suspended from the arches. An atmosphere of mystery seems diffused in the twilight.

A Sacristan, small, bent, gray-haired, gouty, is cleaning the aisle. After having finished his cleaning, grumbling all the while, he opens the alms box.

THE SACRISTAN [*who has opened the box and is counting out a handful of pennies*] There . . . I knew it would be so. It's the same thing every Saturday. Just a handful of coppers. . . . [*He shakes his head*] The whole treasure fits in my hand! . . . No wonder! Only beggars come here. . . . This is the Madonna of the poor. . . . You must have an empty pocket in order to obtain a favor. . . . She listens only to the prayer of the desperate . . . of those who have no roof over their heads . . . yes . . . yes . . . it's so. . . . Even the miracles are performed only for the poor. You'd think She didn't understand the language of the rich; . . . yes, yes . . . you have to lose everything to get Her help. . . . [*He counts the pennies over and over again*] They say She appreciates pennies more than gold coins . . . so here are the alms for a week! . . . [*He pours the pennies into a leather pouch*] here they are. . . .

[*While the Sacristan is grumbling to himself, a door opens slowly at the side. Against the flaming sky illuminated by the setting sun, The Mother's figure is sharply drawn — curved, weary. The door closes behind her and she comes down with faltering steps. She makes the sign of the Cross with fervor, then leans against the Holy Water*

Fount as if she could go no further. The Sacristan, who had not heard her come in, sees her, motionless, like a shadow, and a feeling of fear sweeps over him. He looks at her for a few moments.]

THE SACRISTAN. Hey, you! What are you doing there?

THE MOTHER [*in a thin voice*] Good man . . . please . . . a word with you. . . .

THE SACRISTAN [*draws nearer, still looking at her with diffidence*] Here I am. . . . What do you want? . . .

THE MOTHER. Will you light this lamp . . . with this oil? . . . [*She takes a little bottle of oil out of her pocket and hands it to him.*]

THE SACRISTAN [*reassured*] Never mind the oil. I have some, too. . . . We need money, rather . . . yes, yes . . . can't light the lamp without it. It's the rule . . . there's a price . . . yes . . . didn't you know it? [*Grumbles to himself*] All these people come here with empty pockets . . . they expect Heaven's favors without paying for them. . . .

THE MOTHER [*in a low voice*] I haven't the money I had brought for this. I lost it. . . . I gave it away. . . . I can't remember. . . . Please light it anyhow . . . do that

for a poor old woman. . . . There is One who repays when we have nothing left. . . .

THE SACRISTAN. You'll have to settle these accounts when you get *there*. . . . We'll see who pays then! In the meantime take back your oil, I don't know what to do with it. . . .

THE MOTHER. No, light it with this oil.

THE SACRISTAN. How can your oil be better than mine?

THE MOTHER. It is the last I had in the house . . . made of the few olive trees left me. . . . Surely God accepts the humble offerings of the poor?

THE SACRISTAN [*who has gone to trim the lamp*] Ah! so you, too, believe there's One above who sees everything? . . . These candles? . . . Yes . . . yes . . . who takes an interest in us, poor dogs? One who appreciates this lamp . . . and this stinking oil that won't burn?

THE MOTHER [*with bewildered eyes and a thin voice that betrays the turmoil within*] Perhaps He does not see the stars' light . . . but these little lights that we kindle to brighten the way. . . . I am sure He sees them. . . . Yes, I hope so. . . .

[*A long pause. The Sacristan is busy tending the lamps*

while he pours forth a stream of scathing words as to the quality of the oil and matches that won't strike.]

THE SACRISTAN. There, your lamp's lighted. . . . Are you satisfied? Now hurry up and say your prayers to obtain your favor . . . yes, I suppose you came up here to obtain some favor. . . .

THE MOTHER. No, I came to give thanks. . . . But tell me something I wish to know. . . . [*She lowers her voice and with a gesture beckons to the Sacristan*] Tell me . . . is it true the Madonna has spoken?

THE SACRISTAN [*disturbed by the woman's mysterious tone, looks at the Sacred Picture with fear*] They say . . . they say She spoke some three hundred years ago. . . . It's printed in the books. . . .

THE MOTHER. And what did She say?

THE SACRISTAN. I don't know . . . perhaps nobody knows. . . . She spoke. . . .

THE MOTHER. To whom?

THE SACRISTAN. To a poor woman. . . .

THE MOTHER. Ah! it must have been a mother. . . . She could only have spoken to a mother. . . .

[*She seems absorbed in that thought. Her pale face betrays her emotion. After a few moments, she drags herself*

heavily to the bench and falls upon her knees. The Sacristan tends the lights on the altar, then takes a bunch of keys hidden in a recess in the wall, and shaking them, comes to the bench where The Mother is kneeling.]

THE SACRISTAN. Now you must really hurry because I'll be closing pretty soon. It is late.

THE MOTHER. Late? You're closing? . . . Why, when I left the village it was barely dawn. . . . Yes, it was dawn; there was only a faint light behind the poplars and a blackbird was singing. . . . Ah! now I know why it took me all day . . . it's because this time the mountain grew higher and higher. . . . I don't know how it is, but it's so . . . it's getting higher and harder every time. . . . I walked and walked and didn't seem to get anywhere. . . . That's why I reached here with the setting sun. . . . [*She sits down, exhausted, resting all her weight upon the back of the bench*] . . . and now I haven't strength enough to go back. I am too tired. . . .

THE SACRISTAN. I don't understand you. . . . Perhaps the sun was too much for your brain . . . a little congestion . . . yes, yes, we old people must beware of the May sun. . . . [*He stands a few moments, looking at the woman in a perplexed way*] But I must lock up. . . . [*He shakes*

the bunch of keys more insistently] We close the church at twilight, just like all the churches in the world. . . . I'm tired, too. . . . It would be a fine how-do-you-do if I had to stay here to wait for those who reach here at closing time! Yes, yes. . . . You should have come at the right time, like all other Christians.

THE MOTHER [*in beseeching tones*] For God's sake . . . can't you see I haven't any strength left? Where do you want me to go? All roads are closed to me . . . all the houses are closed to me. . . . There is no room for me in all the world. . . . Have pity . . . lock me in the church for the night. . . .

THE SACRISTAN. What did you say? Lock you in? What for? . . . Don't you know I'm responsible for the Sanctuary? . . . yes, yes, if anything should be missing I'd have to pay. . . . I must put you out. Make up your mind.

THE MOTHER. Be charitable! Let me stay here. . . . A little while ago I noticed that a swallow had built his nest under this roof. You're not going to drive it away from God's house . . . and if you can't drive a swallow away I am sure you won't send me away . . . a poor old woman who has nobody . . . all alone in the world. . . .

THE SACRISTAN [*looking at her intently, seems moved by her plea*] Is it possible that there is no one waiting for you at home? Or in the village?

THE MOTHER. Nobody.

THE SACRISTAN. No friends? No relatives?

THE MOTHER. Nobody.

THE SACRISTAN. No children?

THE MOTHER [*putting her hand to her heart as if it were pierced*] Yes, one . . . but he is far away.

THE SACRISTAN. Where is he? Perhaps in America?

THE MOTHER. No . . . farther still. . . .

THE SACRISTAN. At least, tell me your name. I know almost all the names of the people around here.

THE MOTHER [*taking her head between her thin and trembling hands*] I can't remember my name any more. . . . How is it that I can not remember it? . . . It's this way. . . . I have no name . . . I am a poor mother. . . . Why do you wish to know my name? . . . We're all without names. . . . The minute we close our eyes . . . four spadefuls of earth and we are nameless. . . . [*She remains a few moments in this state of bewilderment, then utters a crazed cry of anguish*] Don't torment me any more. If you doubt

me, if you think I am a thief . . . well . . . treat me like a thief. . . . Perhaps I did steal. . . . If you say so then I must have stolen. . . . But don't ask me any more. . . . I'm too tired. . . . Let me sleep here.

THE SACRISTAN [*impatiently*] Very well, stay. . . . I can't take a broom and sweep you out. I'll ring the Angelus and lock you inside. . . . [*He goes toward the door leading to the steeple and grumbles*] This, too, had to happen to me . . . a crazy woman in the church! Yes, yes . . . she must be crazy, or maybe she's an impostor? . . . yes, yes, like the one who emptied the poor-box. . . . She might be a saint, too! But it's hard to say what's what nowadays.

[*The Sacristan enters the steeple through the side door. After a few moments the silvery bells are heard ringing the Angelus, flooding the dark Sanctuary with their celestial message. The Mother, in an ecstatic stupor, rises from the bench and tries to reach the altar. She grasps a column as her strength fails her.*]

THE MOTHER. They rang just so . . . just so . . . but then it was dawn . . . and now it is night. . . . Yes, they rang just so. . . . I remember now. . . . It was dawn. . . . [*She clasps her hands and falls upon her knees*] Holy

Mary, mother of grace . . . pray . . . pray for us . . . for me. . . . I don't know. . . . I can't remember . . . pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. . . . Ah! I've forgotten the prayers. . . . And if I can't pray, nobody will answer me . . . [*Her words come painfully*] nobody. . . .

[*The Sacristan re-enters the church. He looks at the woman a moment, then goes out by the side door. There is the sound of a key being turned in a rusty lock. Sepulchral silence. The chapel is in darkness, faintly lighted by the votive lamp. Then The Mother drags herself upon her knees to the foot of the altar, and with the little strength left in her weak body she speaks mournfully to the Mother of Calvary.*]

Ah! you, yes . . . ah! yes because you held Him upon your knee, dead, but yours. . . . Mine is no longer mine. . . . They've taken out his heart. They've exchanged it for another's. . . . He is far away and does not know me. . . . He does not remember . . . he does not love his mother. . . . But I love him more than ever . . . much more than that morning when I gave my blood for him. . . . No, more than my blood . . . when I tore out my heart with both hands to save his body. You know what

I have given! Then you listened to my prayer. . . . I remember . . . the voice . . . the light . . . I remember, remember. . . . But now I've dragged myself all the way up here because I crave another favor of you. . . . Yes, yes, a greater miracle. . . . You must do it . . . I must save his soul . . . I can't let him die that way. . . . If I have hurt him . . . if I made him suffer . . . I must save him . . . I must give all for him. . . . [*Her voice grows weaker and is lost in a tired moan and in words murmured by her bloodless lips*] All . . . for him. . . . But what more can I give? . . . I have but these bones . . . these rags . . . I have nothing to take away. . . . Not even a drop of blood . . . not even a tear . . . I can't even weep any more. . . . I have nothing . . . see [*She raises her hands to the Virgin, leaning against the altar*] I am empty . . . empty. . . . I came up bringing something and now . . . there's nothing . . . ashes. . . . Ah! tell me what I can offer? Speak. . . . Mary! . . . If you have spoken to others . . . speak to me, too . . . speak. . . . [*She listens intently as if to catch a far-off sound in the darkness. Her body sways slowly and falls upon its side at the foot of the altar. An expression of consolation lightens the face of the dying woman as if indeed she heard some one speak*] Ah!

the voice. . . . [*Her lips seem to repeat some of the mysterious words passing between heaven and earth. Then reclining her head in eternal peace, she murmurs*] Enough, enough. . . . Thy will be done.

CURTAIN

GHOSTS

BY

HENRIK IBSEN

English Translation by

WILLIAM ARCHER

INTRODUCTION

THE return of Duse marks simultaneously the return of Ibsen. When the great Italian tragedienne comes to say farewell to America under the direction of Morris Gest, after an absence which would have erased the memory of anyone else, she will continue that partnership between north and south, between her sunny Italy and the bleak fiord land which she has always loved to illumine and wake into deeply passionate life by the inner fire of her spirit. Nothing would seem farther from the alternate gayety and turbulence of Duse's *patria* than the stark, constrained tragedies of Ibsen, but she has found therein a channel for expressing the primitive, universal human emotions, an outlet for the pitiful longings and despairs of humankind.

Latterly, though not for so long as Duse, Ibsen has been in eclipse on our stage. We have had "Peer Gynt," of course, but that is not the Ibsen we think of when we wish to give credit, as Ibsen himself puts it, for "moving some boundaries" of modern drama. "A Doll's House." "An Enemy of the People." And "Ghosts." It is a half dozen years since we have had an Ibsen season—this Ibsen. And that season was not broadly representative.

The Ibsen who returns with Duse is not the firebrand, the iconoclast, the revolutionist, the mover of boundary posts, with whom we hesitated to shake hands back in 1894 when Ida Jeffreys Goodfriend first played Mrs. Alving in "Ghosts" in English at the Berkeley Lyceum. He is not the same Ibsen, even, whom Mary Shaw dared critics and police to smother when she carried "Ghosts" across the country in 1903, nor yet the same whom the Russian Orlenieff lit for us with Slavic terror in the rôle of Oswald as late as 1912. The boundary posts have been moved — the particular

boundary posts with which Ibsen was concerned. Others stand in need of transplanting now, but that is not our present concern. Ibsen's revolution is over—his esthetic revolution, if not yet completely the social revolution which he sought to influence and hasten thereby.

"Ghosts" today, therefore, is no longer a question of morality, immorality, any more than "Mrs. Warren's Profession" or "Hindle Wakes" or "The Easiest Way." These plays which were the storm centers of dramatic, ethical and religious controversy from the eighteen eighties and a quarter of a century after, have to stand on their own feet in 1923 as dramas, as stories of human rather than social interest. There is nothing like this test to prove the inherent worth of a play. Specious timely and controversial values melt away under the withering sun of time. Revival is the acid gauntlet of permanent significance. "Mrs. Warren" and "Hindle Wakes" were disclosed thereby as the pamphlets of the hour they were. "The Easiest Way" endured the ordeal surprisingly well. And Ibsen, as those who in the days of storm and stress detected the master hand of the poet beneath the trenchant statement of contemporary issues, weathers the storm without a tremor. Mrs. Alving's poignant story and Mrs. Alving as a figure epitomizing the tragedy of motherhood are values, issues, for all time.

It is interesting, in connection with Duse's choice of "Ghosts" for her American repertory, to note that the play found its way into Italy at an early date—in 1892, to be exact, two years before we saw it in our own tongue—and that it was a favorite with Duse's countrymen, Zacconi and Novelli. In this respect, too, it may not be by the way to recall that Ibsen conceived and mapped out "Ghosts" while spending the summer of 1880 in Berchtesgaden, the little Bavarian village a morning's walk across the border from Salzburg which has been called "the northernmost Italian city" and which cast its Italian spell throughout the neighboring countryside.

THE EDITOR

CAST OF CHARACTERS.

MRS. ALVING (HELEN) — *Widow of Captain Alving, late Chamberlain * to the King.*

OSWALD ALVING — *Her son, a painter.*

PASTOR MANDERS.

JACOB ENGSTRAND — *A carpenter.*

REGINA ENGSTRAND — *Mrs. Alving's maid.*

The action takes place at Mrs. Alving's country-house, beside one of the large fiords, in Western Norway.

* Chamberlain (Kammerherre) is the only title of honor now existing in Norway, where titular nobility was abolished in 1814. It is a distinction conferred by the King on men of wealth and position, and is, of course, not hereditary.

GHOSTS.*

ACT ONE.

A spacious garden-room, with one door to the left, and two doors to the right. In the middle of the room a round table, with chairs around it. On the table lie books, periodicals, and newspapers. In the foreground to the left a window, and by it a small sofa, with a work-table in front of it. In the background, the room is continued into a somewhat narrower conservatory, which is shut in by glass walls with large panes. In the right-hand wall of the conservatory is a door leading down into the garden. Through the glass wall one catches a glimpse of a gloomy fiord-landscape, veiled by steady rain.

Engstrand, the carpenter, stands by the garden door. His left leg is rather crooked; he has a clump of wood under the sole of his boot. Regina, with an empty garden syringe in her hand, hinders him from advancing.

REGINA [*in a low voice*] What do you want? Stop where you are. You are positively dripping.

ENGSTRAND. It's the Lord's own rain, my girl.

REGINA. It's the devil's rain, *I* say.

* The Norwegian title, *Gengangere*, is not exactly represented by our word *Ghosts*. It means literally "Again-goers," spirits that "walk." The French word, "Revenants," comes nearer the sense.

ENGSTRAND. Lord! how you talk, Regina. [*Limps a few steps forward into the room*] What I wanted to say was this —

REGINA. Don't clatter so with that foot of yours, I tell you! The young master is asleep upstairs.

ENGSTRAND. Asleep? In the middle of the day?

REGINA. It's no business of yours.

ENGSTRAND. I was out on the loose last night —

REGINA. I can quite believe that.

ENGSTRAND. Yes, we're weak vessels, we poor mortals, my girl —

REGINA. So it seems.

ENGSTRAND. —and temptations are manifold in this world, you see; but all the same, I was hard at work, God knows, at half-past five this morning.

REGINA. Very well; only be off now; I won't stop here and have *rendezvous's* with you.

ENGSTRAND. What is it you won't have?

REGINA. I won't have anyone find you here; so just you go about your business.

ENGSTRAND [*advances a step or two*] Blest if I go before I've had a talk with you. This afternoon I shall have finished my work down at the school-house, and then I shall take to-night's boat and be off home to the town.

REGINA [*mutters*] A pleasant journey to you.

ENGSTRAND. Thank you, my child. To-morrow the Asylum is to be opened, and then there'll be fine doings, no doubt, and plenty of intoxicating drink going, you know. And nobody shall say of Jacob Engstrand that he can't keep out of temptation's way.

REGINA. Oh!

ENGSTRAND. You see, there are to be any number of

swells here to-morrow. Pastor Manders is expected from town, too.

REGINA. He's coming to-day.

ENGSTRAND. There! you see. And I should be cursedly sorry if he found out anything to my disadvantage, don't you understand?

REGINA. Oh! is that your game?

ENGSTRAND. Is what my game?

REGINA [*looking hard at him*] What trick are you going to play on Pastor Manders?

ENGSTRAND. Hush! hush! Are you crazy? Do *I* want to play any trick on Pastor Manders? Oh, no! Pastor Manders has been far too kind to me for that. But I just wanted to tell you, you know — that I mean to set off home again to-night.

REGINA. The sooner the better, for my part.

ENGSTRAND. Yes. But I want to take you with me, Regina.

REGINA [*open-mouthed*] You want me — ? What are you talking about?

ENGSTRAND. I want to take you home, I say.

REGINA [*scornfully*] Never in this world shall you get me home with you.

ENGSTRAND. We shall see about that.

REGINA. Yes, you may be sure we shall see about it! I, who have been brought up by a lady like Mrs. Alving! I, who am treated almost as a daughter here! Is it me you want to go home with you? — to a house like yours? For shame!

ENGSTRAND. What the devil do you mean? Do you set yourself up against your father, girl?

REGINA [*mutters without looking at him*] You've said often enough that I was no child of yours.

ENGSTRAND. Stuff! Why should you trouble about that?

REGINA. Haven't you many a time sworn at me and called me a — ? *Fi donc!*

ENGSTRAND. Curse me, now, if I ever used such an ugly word.

REGINA. Oh! I know quite well what word you used.

ENGSTRAND. Well, but that was only when I was a bit on, don't you know? H'm! Temptations are manifold in this world, Regina.

REGINA. Ugh!

ENGSTRAND. And when your mother rode her high horse, I had to hit upon something to twit her with. She was always setting up for a fine lady. [*Mimics*] "Let me go, Engstrand; let me be. Remember I've been three years in Chamberlain Alving's family at Rosenvold." [*Laughs*] Mercy on us! She never could forget that the Captain was made a Chamberlain while she was in service here.

REGINA. Poor mother! you very soon worried her into her grave.

ENGSTRAND [*turns on his heel*] Oh, of course. I am to be blamed for everything.

REGINA [*turns away; half aloud*] Ugh! and that leg, too!

ENGSTRAND. What do you say, girl?

REGINA. *Pied de mouton.*

ENGSTRAND. Is that English, eh?

REGINA. Yes.

ENGSTRAND. Oh, ah; you've picked up some learning out here; and that may come in useful now, Regina.

REGINA [*after a short silence*] What do you want with me in town?

ENGSTRAND. Can you ask what a father wants with his only child? Am I not a lonely and forsaken widower?

REGINA. Oh! don't try on any nonsense like that! Why do you want me?

ENGSTRAND. Well, let me tell you, I've been thinking of starting a new line of business.

REGINA [*contemptuously*] You've tried that often enough, and never done any good.

ENGSTRAND. Yes, but this time you shall see, Regina! Devil take me —

REGINA [*stamps*] Don't swear!

ENGSTRAND. Hush, hush; you're right enough there, my girl. What I wanted to say was just this — I've laid by a very tidy pile from this Orphanage job.

REGINA. Have you? That's a good thing for you.

ENGSTRAND. What can a man spend his ha'pence on here in the country?

REGINA. Well, what then?

ENGSTRAND. Why, you see, I thought of putting the money into some paying speculation. I thought of a sort of sailor's tavern —

REGINA. Horrid!

ENGSTRAND. A regular high-class affair, of course; not a mere pigstye for common sailors. No! damn it! it would be for captains and mates, and— and — all these swells, you know.

REGINA. And I was to — ?

ENGSTRAND. You were to help, to be sure. Only for appearance sake, you understand. Devil a bit of hard work shall you have, my girl. You shall do exactly what you like.

REGINA. Oh, indeed!

ENGSTRAND. But there must be a petticoat in the house.

That's as clear as daylight. For I want to have it a little lively in the evenings, with singing and dancing and so forth. You must remember they are weary wanderers on the ocean of life. [Nearer.] Now don't be stupid and stand in your own light, Regina. What can become of you out here? What good is it to you that your mistress has given you a lot of learning? You're to look after the children at the new Orphanage, I hear. Is that the sort of thing for you, eh? Are you so desperately bent upon wearing yourself out for the sake of the dirty brats?

REGINA. No; if things go as I want them to, then — well, there's no saying — there's no saying.

ENGSTRAND. What do you mean by "there's no saying"?

REGINA. Never you mind. Is it a great deal of money you've saved up here?

ENGSTRAND. What with one thing and another, a matter of seven or eight hundred crowns.*

REGINA. That's not so bad.

ENGSTRAND. It's enough to make a start with, my girl.

REGINA. Aren't you thinking of giving me any of that money?

ENGSTRAND. No, I'm damned if I am!

REGINA. Aren't you thinking of sending me so much as a scrap of stuff for a new dress?

ENGSTRAND. If you'll come to town with me, you can get dresses enough.

REGINA. Pooh! I can do that on my own account if I want to.

ENGSTRAND. No, a father's guiding hand is what you want, Regina. Now, I can have a capital little house in

* A "krone" is equal to about twenty-seven cents par value.

Little Harbor Street. I won't need much ready-money, and it could be a sort of sailors' home, you know.

REGINA. But I will *not* live with you. I have nothing whatever to do with you. Be off!

ENGSTRAND. You wouldn't remain long with me, my girl. No such luck! If you knew how to play your cards, such a fine girl as you've grown in the last year or two —

REGINA. Well?

ENGSTRAND. It wouldn't be long before some mate came in your way, or it might even be a captain —

REGINA. I won't marry anyone of that sort. Sailors have no *savoir vivre*.

ENGSTRAND. What haven't they got?

REGINA. I know what sailors are, I tell you. They're not the sort of people to marry.

ENGSTRAND. Then never mind about marrying them. You can make it pay all the same. [*More confidentially*] He — the Englishman — the man with the yacht — he gave three hundred dollars, he did; and she wasn't a bit handsomer than you are.

REGINA [*going toward him*] Out you go!

ENGSTRAND [*falling back*] Come, come! You're not going to strike me, I hope.

REGINA. Yes, if you begin to talk about mother I shall strike you. Get away with you, I say. [*Drives him back toward the garden door*] And don't bang the doors. Young Mr. Alving —

ENGSTRAND. He's asleep. Yes, I know. It's curious how you're taken up about young Mr. Alving. [*More softly*] Oho! it surely can't be he that —

REGINA. Be off, and quickly! you're crazy, I tell you!

No, don't go that way. There comes Pastor Manders. Down the kitchen stairs with you.

ENGSTRAND [*toward the right*] Yes, yes, I'm going. But just you talk to him that's coming there. He's the man to tell you what a child owes to its father. For I am your father all the same, you know. I can prove it from the church-register. [*He goes out through the second door to the right, which Regina has opened, and fastens again after him. Regina glances hastily at herself in the mirror, dusts herself with her pocket-handkerchief, and settles her collar; then she busies herself with the flowers.*]

MANDERS [*in an overcoat, with an umbrella, and with a small traveling-bag on a strap over his shoulder, comes through the garden door into the conservatory*] Good-morning, Miss Engstrand.

REGINA [*turning round, surprised and pleased*] No, really! Good-morning, Pastor Manders. Is the steamer in already?

MANDERS. It's just in. [*Enters the sitting-room*] Terrible weather we've been having lately.

REGINA [*follows him*] It's such blessed weather for the country, sir.

MANDERS. Yes, you're quite right. We townspeople think too little about that. [*He begins to take off his overcoat.*]

REGINA. Oh! mayn't I help you? There! Why! how wet it is! I'll just hang it up in the hall. And your umbrella, too. I'll open it and let it dry. [*She goes out with the things through the second door on the right. Mr. Manders takes his traveling-bag off and lays it and his hat on a chair. Meanwhile Regina comes in again.*]

MANDERS. Ah! it's a comfort to get safe under cover. Well, is all going on well here?

REGINA. Yes, thank you, sir.

MANDERS. You have your hands full, I suppose, in preparation for to-morrow?

REGINA. Yes, there's plenty to do, of course.

MANDERS. And Mrs. Alving is at home, I trust?

REGINA. Oh, dear yes. She's just upstairs looking after the young master's chocolate.

MANDERS. Yes, by the bye — I heard down at the pier that Oswald had arrived.

REGINA. Yes, he came the day before yesterday. We didn't expect him before to-day.

MANDERS. Quite strong and well, I hope?

REGINA. Yes, thank you, quite; but dreadfully tired with the journey. He has made one rush all the way from Paris. I believe he came all the way in one train. I believe he is sleeping a little now; so perhaps we'd better talk a little quietly.

MANDERS. Hush! — as quietly as you please.

REGINA [*arranging an arm-chair beside the table*] Now, do sit down, Pastor Manders, and make yourself comfortable. [*He sits down; she puts a footstool under his feet.*] There! are you comfortable now, sir?

MANDERS. Thanks, thanks, I am most comfortable. [*Looks at her*] Do you know, Miss Engstrand, I positively think you have grown since I last saw you.

REGINA. Do you think so, sir? Mrs. Alving says my figure has developed, too.

MANDERS. Developed? Well, perhaps a little; just enough. [*Short pause.*]

REGINA. Shall I tell Mrs. Alving you are here?

MANDERS. Thanks, thanks, there's no hurry, my dear

child. By the bye, Regina, my good girl, just tell me, how is your father getting on out here?

REGINA. Oh, thank you, he is getting on well enough.

MANDERS. He called upon me last time he was in town.

REGINA. Did he, indeed? He's always so glad of a chance of talking to you, sir.

MANDERS. And you often look in upon him at his work, I daresay.

REGINA. I? Oh, of course, when I have time, I —

MANDERS. Your father is not a man of strong character, Miss Engstrand. He stands terribly in need of a guiding hand.

REGINA. Oh, yes; I dare say he does.

MANDERS. He needs to have someone near him whom he cares for, and whose judgment he respects. He frankly admitted that when he last came to see me.

REGINA. Yes, he has said something of the sort to me. But I don't know whether Mrs. Alving can spare me; especially now, when we have got the new Orphanage to manage. And then I should be so sorry to leave Mrs. Alving; she has always been so kind to me.

MANDERS. But a daughter's duty, my good girl — Of course we must first get your mistress' consent.

REGINA. But I don't know whether it would be quite proper for me, at my age, to keep house for a single man.

MANDERS. What! my dear Miss Engstrand! When the man is your own father.

REGINA. Yes, that may be, but all the same — Now if it were in a thoroughly respectable house, and with a real gentleman —

MANDERS. But, my dear Regina —

REGINA. — one I could really love and respect, and be a daughter to —

MANDERS. Yes, but my dear, good child —

REGINA. Then I should be glad to go to town. It's very lonely out here; and you know yourself, sir, what it is to be alone in the world. And so much I can say for myself, I am both quick and willing. Don't you know of any such place for me, sir?

MANDERS. I? No, certainly not.

REGINA. But, dear, dear sir, do remember me if —

MANDERS [*rising*] Yes, yes, certainly, Miss Engstrand.

REGINA. For if I —

MANDERS. Will you be so kind as to fetch your mistress?

REGINA. I will, at once, sir. [*She goes out to the left.*]

MANDERS [*goes two or three times up and down the room, stands a moment in the background with his hands behind his back, and looks out over the garden. Then he returns to the table, takes up a book, and looks at the title-page; starts and looks at several*] H'm — indeed!

[*Mrs. Alving enters by the door on the left; she is followed by Regina, who immediately goes out through the first door on the right.*]

MRS. ALVING [*holds out her hand*] Welcome, my dear Pastor.

MANDERS. How do you do, Mrs. Alving? Here I am, as I promised.

MRS. ALVING. Always punctual to the minute.

MANDERS. You may believe it wasn't so easy for me to get away. With all the Boards and Committees I belong to —

MRS. ALVING. That makes it all the kinder of you to come so early. Now we can get through our business before dinner. But where is your luggage?

MANDERS [*quickly*] I left it down at the inn. I shall sleep there to-night.

MRS. ALVING [*suppressing a smile*] Are you really not to be persuaded, even now, to pass the night under my roof?

MANDERS. No, no, Mrs. Alving; many thanks. I shall stay down there as usual. It is so convenient for starting again.

MRS. ALVING. Well, you must have your own way. But I really should have thought that we two old people —

MANDERS. Now, you're making fun of me. Ah! to be sure! this is a joyful day for you. You have got to-morrow's festival to look forward to and then you have got Oswald home again.

MRS. ALVING. Yes; you can think what a delight it is to me. It is more than two years since he was last home. And now he has promised to stay with me all winter.

MANDERS. Has he really? That's very nice and dutiful of him. For I can well believe that life in Rome and Paris has far more attractions.

MRS. ALVING. True. But here he has his mother, you see. My own darling boy, he hasn't forgotten his love for his mother!

MANDERS. It would be grievous, indeed, if absence and working at art and that sort of thing were to blunt his natural feeling.

MRS. ALVING. Yes, you may well say so. But there is nothing of that sort to fear in him. I am quite curious to see if you would know him again. He will be down

presently; he's upstairs just now, resting a little on the sofa. But do sit down, my dear Pastor.

MANDERS. Thank you. Then it's quite convenient for you?

MRS. ALVING. Certainly. [*She sits by the table.*]

MANDERS. Very well. Then you shall see — [*He goes to the chair where his traveling-bag lies, takes out a packet of papers, sits down on the opposite side of the table, and tries to find a clear space for the papers*] Now, to begin with, here is — [*Breaking off*] Tell me, Mrs. Alving, how do these books come here?

MRS. ALVING. These books? They are books I am reading.

MANDERS. Do you read this sort of literature?

MRS. ALVING. Certainly I do.

MANDERS. Do you feel yourself better or happier for reading of this kind?

MRS. ALVING. I feel myself, so to speak, more secure.

MANDERS. That's strange. How do you mean?

MRS. ALVING. Well, I seem to find explanation and confirmation of all sorts of things I myself have been thinking. For that is the wonderful part of it, Pastor Manders; there is really nothing new in these books, nothing but what most people think and believe. Only most people either do not formulate it to themselves, or else keep quiet about it.

MANDERS. Great heavens! Do you really believe that most people — ?

MRS. ALVING. I do, indeed.

MANDERS. But surely not in this country? Not here with us?

MRS. ALVING. Yes, certainly, with us, too.

MANDERS. Well, I really must say —

MRS. ALVING. For the rest, what do you object to in these books?

MANDERS. Object to in them? You surely don't suppose that I have nothing to do but study such productions as these?

MRS. ALVING. That is to say, you know nothing of what you are condemning.

MANDERS. I have read enough *about* these writings to disapprove of them.

MRS. ALVING. Yes; but your own opinion —

MANDERS. My dear Mrs. Alving, there are many occasions in life where one must rely upon others. It is so in this world; and it is a good thing. How could society get on otherwise?

MRS. ALVING. Well, I dare say you are right there.

MANDERS. Besides, I of course don't deny that there may be much that is interesting in such books. Nor can I blame you for wishing to keep up with the intellectual movements which are said to be going on in the great world, where you have let your son pass so much of his life. But —

MRS. ALVING. But?

MANDERS [*lowering his voice*] But one shouldn't talk about it, Mrs. Alving. One is certainly not bound to account to everybody for what one reads and thinks within one's own four walls.

MRS. ALVING. Of course not; I quite think so.

MANDERS. Only think, now, how you are bound to consider the interests of this Orphanage which you decided on founding at a time when your opinions on spiritual matters were very different from what they are now — so far as I can judge.

MRS. ALVING. Oh, yes; I quite admit that. But it was about the Orphanage —

MANDERS. It was about the Orphanage we were to speak; yes. All I say is: prudence, my dear lady! And now we'll get to business. [*Opens the packet, and takes out a number of papers*] Do you see these?

MRS. ALVING. The documents?

MANDERS. All — and in perfect order. I can tell you it was hard work to get them in time. I had to put on strong pressure. The authorities are almost painfully scrupulous when you want them to come to the point. But here they are at last. [*Looks through the bundle*] See! here is the formal deed of gift of the parcel of ground known as Solvik in the Manor of Rosenvold, with all the newly constructed buildings, schoolrooms, master's house, and chapel. And here is the legal fiat for the endowment and for the regulations of the Institution. Will you look at them? [*Reads*] "Regulations for the Children's Home to be Known as 'Captain Alving's Foundation.'"

MRS. ALVING [*looks long at paper*] So there it is.

MANDERS. I have chosen the name "Captain" rather than "Chamberlain." Captain looks less pretentious.

MRS. ALVING. Oh, yes; just as you think best.

MANDERS. And here you have the bank account of the capital lying at interest to cover the current expenses of the Orphanage.

MRS. ALVING. Thank you; but please keep it — it will be more convenient.

MANDERS. With pleasure. I think we will leave the money in the bank for the present. The interest is certainly not what we could wish — four per cent. and six months' notice of withdrawal. If a good mortgage could be found

later on — of course it must be a first mortgage and an undoubted security — then we could consider the matter.

MRS. ALVING. Certainly, my dear Pastor Manders. You are the best judge in these things.

MANDERS. I will keep my eyes open, at any rate. But now there is one thing more which I have several times been intending to ask you.

MRS. ALVING. And what is that?

MANDERS. Shall the Orphanage buildings be insured or not?

MRS. ALVING. Of course they must be insured.

MANDERS. Well, stop a minute, Mrs. Alving. Let us look into the matter a little more closely.

MRS. ALVING. I have everything insured; buildings and movables and stock and crops.

MANDERS. Of course you have — on your own estate. And so have I — of course. But here, you see, it is quite another matter. The Orphanage is to be consecrated, as it were, to a higher purpose.

MRS. ALVING. Yes, but that's no reason —

MANDERS. For my own part, I should not see the smallest impropriety in guarding against all contingencies —

MRS. ALVING. No, I should think not.

MANDERS. But what is the general feeling in the neighborhood? You, of course, know better than I.

MRS. ALVING. H'm — the general feeling —

MANDERS. Is there any considerable number of people — really responsible people — who might be scandalized?

MRS. ALVING. What do you mean by "really responsible people"?

MANDERS. Well, I mean men in such independent and

influential positions that one cannot help allowing some weight to their opinions.

MRS. ALVING. There are several people of that sort here who would very likely be shocked if —

MANDERS. There, you see! In town we have many such people. Think of all my colleague's adherents! People would be only too ready to interpret our action as a sign that neither you nor I had the right faith in a Higher Providence.

MRS. ALVING. But so far as you are concerned, my dear Pastor, you have, at least, the consciousness that —

MANDERS. Yes, I know — I know; my conscience would be quite easy, that is true enough. But nevertheless we should not escape grave misinterpretation; and that might very likely react upon the Orphanage, and restrict its usefulness.

MRS. ALVING. Well, if that were to be the case, then —

MANDERS. Nor can I lose sight of the difficult — I may even say painful — position I might perhaps get into. In the leading circles of the town people are much taken up about this Orphanage. It is, of course, founded partly for the benefit of the town, as well; and it is to be hoped it will, in no inconsiderable degree, result in lightening our Poor Rates. But as I have been your adviser, and have had the business matters in my hands, I cannot but fear that I may have to bear the brunt of fanaticism —

MRS. ALVING. Oh! you mustn't run the risk of that.

MANDERS. To say nothing of the attacks that would assuredly be made upon me in certain papers and periodicals, which —

MRS. ALVING. Enough, my dear Pastor Manders. That consideration is quite decisive.

MANDERS. Then you do not wish the Orphanage insured?

MRS. ALVING. No. We will let it alone.

MANDERS [*leaning back in his chair*] But if a misfortune were to happen? — one can never tell. Would you be able to make good the damage?

MRS. ALVING. No; I tell you plainly I should do nothing of the kind.

MANDERS. Then I must tell you, Mrs. Alving, it is really no small responsibility we are taking upon ourselves.

MRS. ALVING. But do you think we can do anything else?

MANDERS. No, that is just the thing; we really can do nothing else. We must not expose ourselves to false interpretation; and we have no right whatever to give offense to our neighbors.

MRS. ALVING. You, as a clergyman, certainly should not.

MANDERS. And I really think, too, we may trust that an institution of this kind has fortune on its side; in fact, that it stands under a Special Providence.

MRS. ALVING. Let us hope so, Pastor Manders.

MANDERS. Then we will let the matter alone.

MRS. ALVING. Yes, certainly.

MANDERS. Very well. Just as you think best. [*Makes a note*] Then — no insurance.

MRS. ALVING. It is rather curious that you should just happen to mention the matter to-day.

MANDERS. I have often thought of asking you about it —

MRS. ALVING. For we very nearly had a fire down there yesterday.

MANDERS. You don't say so.

MRS. ALVING. Oh, it was of no importance. A heap of shavings had caught fire in the carpenter's workshop.

MANDERS. Where Engstrand works?

MRS. ALVING. Yes. They say he's often very careless with matches.

MANDERS. He has so many things in his head, that man — so many temptations. Thank God, he is now striving to lead a decent life, I hear.

MRS. ALVING. Indeed! Who says so?

MANDERS. He himself assures me of it. And he is certainly a capital workman.

MRS. ALVING. Oh, yes; so long as he is sober.

MANDERS. Yes, that's a sad weakness. But he is often driven to it by his bad leg, he says. Last time he was in town I was really touched by him. He came to me and thanked me so warmly for having got him work here, so that he might be near Regina.

MRS. ALVING. He doesn't see much of *her*.

MANDERS. Oh, yes. He has a talk with her every day. He told me so himself.

MRS. ALVING. Well, it may be so.

MANDERS. He feels so clearly that he needs someone to hold him back when temptation comes. That is what I can't help liking about Jacob Engstrand; he comes to you helplessly, accusing himself and confessing his own weakness. The last time he was talking to me — Believe me, Mrs. Alving, supposing it were a real necessity for him to have Regina home again —

MRS. ALVING [*rising hastily*] Regina!

MANDERS. You must not set yourself against it.

MRS. ALVING. Indeed I shall set myself against it. And besides, Regina is to have a position in the Orphanage

MANDERS. But, after all, remember he's her father —

MRS. ALVING. Oh! I know best what sort of a father he has been to her. No! she shall never go to him with my good-will.

MANDERS [*rising*] My dear lady, don't take the matter so warmly. You misjudge Engstrand sadly. You seem to be quite terrified —

MRS. ALVING [*more quietly*] It doesn't matter. I have taken Regina into my house, and there she shall stay. [*Listens*] Hush, my dear Mr. Manders; don't say any more about it. [*Her face lights up with gladness*] Listen! there is Oswald coming down the stairs. Now we will think of no one but him.

OSWALD ALVING [*in a light overcoat, hat in hand, and smoking a large meerschaum, enters through the door on the left; standing in the doorway*] Oh! I beg your pardon; I thought you were sitting in the office. [*Comes forward*] Good-morning, Pastor Manders!

MANDERS [*staring*] Ah — ! How strange — !

MRS. ALVING. Well, now what do you say to this young man, Mr. Manders?

MANDERS. I say — I say — why! is it really — ?

OSWALD. Yes, it is really the Prodigal Son, sir.

MANDERS [*protesting*] My dear young friend — !

OSWALD. Well, then, the reclaimed Son.

MRS. ALVING. Oswald is thinking of the time when you were so much opposed to his being a painter.

MANDERS. To our human eyes many a step seems dubious which afterward proves — [*Wrings his hand*] Anyhow, welcome, welcome home. Why, my dear Oswald — I suppose I may call you by your Christian name?

OSWALD. Yes; what else should you call me?

MANDERS. Very good. What I wanted to say was this, my dear Oswald — you must not believe that I utterly condemn the artist's calling. I have no doubt there are many who can keep their inner self unharmed in that profession, as in any other.

OSWALD. Let us hope so.

MRS. ALVING [*beaming with delight*] I know one who has kept both his inner and outer self unharmed. Only look at him, Mr. Manders.

OSWALD [*moves restlessly about the room*] Yes, yes, my dear mother; let's say no more about it.

MANDERS. Why, certainly — it can't be denied. And you have begun to make a name for yourself already. The newspapers have often spoken of you, and most favorably. By the bye, just lately they haven't mentioned you so often, I fancy.

OSWALD [*up in the conservatory*] I have not been able to paint so much lately.

MRS. ALVING. Even a painter needs a little rest now and then.

MANDERS. I can quite believe it. And, meanwhile, he can be gathering his forces and preparing himself for some great work.

OSWALD. Yes. Mother, will dinner soon be ready?

MRS. ALVING. In less than half an hour. He has a capital appetite, thank God.

MANDERS. And a taste for tobacco, too.

OSWALD. I found my father's pipe in my room, and so —

MANDERS. Aha! then that accounts for it.

MRS. ALVING. For what?

MANDERS. When Oswald stood there in the doorway,

with the pipe in his mouth, I could have sworn I saw his father, large as life.

OSWALD. No, really?

MRS. ALVING. Oh! how can you say so? Oswald takes after me.

MANDERS. Yes, but there is an expression about the corners of the mouth — something about the lips that reminds one exactly of Alving; at any rate now that he is smoking.

MRS. ALVING. Not in the least. Oswald has rather a clerical curve about his mouth, I think.

MANDERS. Yes, yes; some of my colleagues have much the same look.

MRS. ALVING. But put your pipe away, my dear boy; I won't have smoking in here.

OSWALD [*does so*] By all means. I only wanted to try it; for I once smoked it when I was a child.

MRS. ALVING. You?

OSWALD. Yes. I was quite small at the time. I recollect I came up to father's room one evening when he was in great spirits.

MRS. ALVING. Oh! you can't recollect anything of those times.

OSWALD. Yes. I recollect distinctly. He took me up on his knees, and gave me the pipe. "Smoke, boy," he said; "smoke away, boy." And I smoked as hard as I could, until I felt I was growing quite pale, and the perspiration stood in great drops on my forehead. Then he burst out laughing heartily.

MANDERS. That was most extraordinary.

MRS. ALVING. My dear friend, it is only something Oswald has dreamt.

OSWALD. No, mother, I assure you I haven't dreamt it. For — don't you remember this? — you came and carried me out into the nursery. Then I was sick, and I saw that you were crying. Did father often play such pranks?

MANDERS. In his youth he overflowed with the joy of life — *

OSWALD. And nevertheless he managed to do so much in the world; so much that was good and useful; and he died so young, too.

MANDERS. Yes, you have indeed inherited the name of an active and worthy man, my dear Oswald Alving. No doubt it will act as a spur to you.

OSWALD. It ought to, indeed.

MANDERS. It was good of you to come home for to-morrow's ceremony in his honor.

OSWALD. I could do no less for my father.

MRS. ALVING. And I am to keep him so long! that is the best of all.

MANDERS. You are going to stop at home through the winter, I hear.

OSWALD. My stay is indefinite, sir. But, oh! how delightful it is to be at home again!

MRS. ALVING [*beaming*] Yes, isn't it?

MANDERS [*looking sympathetically at him*] You went out into the world early, my dear Oswald.

OSWALD. I did. I sometimes wonder whether it was not too early.

MRS. ALVING. Oh, not at all. A healthy lad is all the better for it; especially when he's an only child. He ought not to hang on at home with mother and father and get spoilt.

* "Livsglæde"—*la joie de vivre.*

MANDERS. It's a very difficult question, Mrs. Alving. A child's proper place is, and must be, the home of his fathers.

OSWALD. There I quite agree with you, Pastor Manders.

MANDERS. Only look at your own son — there is no reason why we shouldn't say it in his presence — what has the consequence been for him? He is six or seven and twenty, and has never had the opportunity of learning what home life really is.

OSWALD. I beg your pardon, Pastor; there you're quite mistaken.

MANDERS. Indeed? I thought you had lived almost exclusively in artistic circles.

OSWALD. So I have.

MANDERS. And chiefly among the younger artists.

OSWALD. Why, certainly.

MANDERS. But I thought few of these young fellows could afford to set up house and support a family.

OSWALD. There are many who can't afford to marry, sir.

MANDERS. Yes, that's just what I say.

OSWALD. But they can have a home for all that. And several of them have, as a matter of fact; and very pleasant, comfortable homes they are, too. [*Mrs. Alving follows with breathless interest; nods, but says nothing.*]

MANDERS. But I am not talking of bachelors' quarters. By a "home" I understand the home of a family, where a man lives with his wife and children.

OSWALD. Yes; or with his children and his children's mother.

MANDERS [*starts; clasps his hands*] But good heavens — !

OSWALD. Well?

MANDERS. Lives with — his children's mother!

OSWALD. Yes. Would you have him turn his children's mother out of doors?

MANDERS. Then it is illicit relations you are talking of. Irregular marriages, as people call them!

OSWALD. I have never noticed anything particularly irregular about the life these people lead.

MANDERS. But how is it possible that a — a young man or young woman with any decent principles can endure to live in that way? — in the eyes of all the world!

OSWALD. What are they to do? A poor young artist — a poor girl. It costs a lot of money to get married. What are they to do?

MANDERS. What are they to do? Let me tell you, Mr. Alving, what they ought to do. They ought to exercise self-restraint from the first; that's what they ought to do.

OSWALD. Such talk as that won't go far with warm-blooded young people, over head and ears in love.

MRS. ALVING. No, it wouldn't go far.

MANDERS [*continuing*] How can the authorities tolerate such things? Allow it to go on in the light of day? [*To Mrs. Alving*] Had I not cause to be deeply concerned about your son? In circles where open immorality prevails, and has even a sort of prestige — !

OSWALD. Let me tell you, sir, that I have been a constant Sunday-guest in one or two such irregular homes —

MANDERS. On Sunday of all days!

OSWALD. Isn't that the day to enjoy one's self? Well, never have I heard an offensive word, and still less have I ever witnessed anything that could be called immoral. No; do you know when and where I have found immorality in artistic circles?

MANDERS. No! Thank heaven, I don't!

OSWALD. Well, then, allow me to inform you. I have met with it when one or other of our pattern husbands and fathers has come to Paris to have a look round on his own account, and has done the artists the honor of visiting their humble haunts. *They* knew what was what. These gentlemen could tell us all about places and things we had never dreamt of.

MANDERS. What? Do you mean to say that respectable men from home here would — ?

OSWALD. Have you never heard these respectable men, when they got home again, talking about the way in which immorality was running rampant abroad?

MANDERS. Yes, of course.

MRS. ALVING. I have, too.

OSWALD. Well, you may take their word for it. They know what they are talking about! [*Presses his hands to his head*] Oh! that that great, free, glorious life out there should be defiled in such a way!

MRS. ALVING. You must not get excited, Oswald. You will do yourself harm.

OSWALD. Yes; you are quite right, mother. It's not good for me. You see, I'm wretchedly worn out. I'll go for a little turn before dinner. Excuse me, Pastor; I know you can't take my point of view; but I couldn't help speaking out. [*He goes out through the second door to the right.*]

MRS. ALVING. My poor boy!

MANDERS. You may well say so. Then that's what it has come to with him!

MRS. ALVING [*looks at him silently*].

MANDERS [*walking up and down*] He called himself the Prodigal Son — alas! alas!

MRS. ALVING [*continues looking at him*].

MANDERS. And what do you say to all this?

MRS. ALVING. I say that Oswald was right in every word.

MANDERS [*stands still*] Right! right! In such principles!

MRS. ALVING. Here, in my loneliness, I have come to the same way of thinking, Pastor Manders. But I have never dared to touch upon the matter. Well! now my boy shall speak for me.

MANDERS. You are much to be pitied, Mrs. Alving. But now I must speak seriously to you. And now it is no longer your business manager and adviser, your own and your late husband's early friend, who stands before you. It is the priest — the priest who stood before you in the moment of your life when you had gone most astray.

MRS. ALVING. And what has the priest to say to me?

MANDERS. I will first stir up your memory a little. The time is well chosen. To-morrow will be the tenth anniversary of your husband's death. To-morrow the memorial in his honor will be unveiled. To-morrow I shall have to speak to the whole assembled multitude. But to-day I will speak to you alone.

MRS. ALVING. Very well, Pastor Manders. Speak.

MANDERS. Do you remember that after less than a year of married life you stood on the verge of an abyss? That you forsook your house and home? That you fled from your husband? Yes, Mrs. Alving — fled, fled, and refused to return to him, however much he begged and prayed of you?

MRS. ALVING. Have you forgotten how infinitely miserable I was in that first year?

MANDERS. It is only the spirit of rebellion that craves for happiness in this life. What right have we human beings to happiness? No, we have to do our duty! And your

duty was to hold firmly to the man you had once chosen and to whom you were bound by a holy tie.

MRS. ALVING. You know very well what sort of life Alving was then leading — what excesses he was guilty of.

MANDERS. I know very well what rumors there were about him, and I am the last to approve the life he led in his young days, if report did not wrong him. But a wife is not to be her husband's judge. It was your duty to bear with humility the cross which a Higher Power had, for your own good, laid upon you. But instead of that you rebelliously cast away the cross, desert the backslider whom you should have supported, go and risk your good name and reputation, and — nearly succeed in ruining other people's reputation into the bargain.

MRS. ALVING. Other people's? One other person's, you mean.

MANDERS. It was unspeakably reckless of you to seek refuge with me.

MRS. ALVING. With our clergyman? With our intimate friend?

MANDERS. Just on that account. Yes, you may thank God that I possessed the necessary firmness; that I dissuaded you from your wild designs, and that it was vouchsafed me to lead you back to the path of duty, and home to your lawful husband.

MRS. ALVING. Yes, Pastor Manders, it was certainly your work.

MANDERS. I was but a poor instrument in a Higher Hand. And what a blessing has it not been to you all the days of your life, that I got you to resume the yoke of duty and obedience! Did it not all happen as I foretold? Did not Alving turn his back on his errors, as a man should?

Did he not live with you from that time, lovingly and blamelessly, all his days? Did he not become a benefactor to the whole district? And did he not raise you up to him so that you, little by little, became his assistant in all his undertakings? And a capital assistant, too — Oh! I know, Mrs. Alving, that praise is due to you. But now I come to the next great false step in your life.

MRS. ALVING. What do you mean?

MANDERS. Just as you once disowned a wife's duty, so you have since disowned a mother's.

MRS. ALVING. Ah!

MANDERS. You have been all your life under the dominion of a pestilent spirit of self-will. All your efforts have been bent toward emancipation and lawlessness. You have never been willing to endure any bond. Everything that has weighed upon you in life you have cast away without care or conscience, like a burden you could throw off at will. It did not please you to be a wife any longer, and you left your husband. You found it troublesome to be a mother, and you sent your child forth among strangers.

MRS. ALVING. Yes. That is true. I did so.

MANDERS. And thus you have become a stranger to him.

MRS. ALVING. No! no! I am not.

MANDERS. Yes, you are; you must be. And how have you got him back again? Bethink yourself well, Mrs. Alving. You have sinned greatly against your husband; — that you recognize by raising yonder memorial to him. Recognize now, also, how you sinned against your son. There may be time to lead him back from the paths of error. Turn back yourself, and restore what may yet be restored in him. For [*with uplifted forefinger*] verily, Mrs. Alving,

you are a guilt-laden mother! — This I have thought it my duty to say to you. [*Silence.*]

MRS. ALVING [*slowly and with self-control*] You have now spoken out, Pastor Manders; and to-morrow you are to speak publicly in memory of my husband. I shall not speak to-morrow. But now I will speak out a little to you, as you have spoken to me.

MANDERS. To be sure. You want to bring forward excuses for your conduct —

MRS. ALVING. No. I will only narrate.

MANDERS. Well?

MRS. ALVING. All that you have just said about me and my husband and our life together, after you had brought me back to the path of duty — as you called it — these are all matters about which you know nothing from your own observation. From that moment you, who had been our intimate friend, never set foot in our house again.

MANDERS. You and your husband left the town immediately after.

MRS. ALVING. Yes. And in my husband's lifetime you never came to see us. It was business that forced you to visit me when you undertook the affairs of the Orphanage.

MANDERS [*softly and uncertainly*] Helen — if that is meant as a reproach, I would beg you to bear in mind —

MRS. ALVING. — the regard you owed to your position; yes, and that I was a runaway wife. One can never be too reserved with such unprincipled creatures.

MANDERS. My dear — Mrs. Alving, you know that is an absurd exaggeration —

MRS. ALVING. Well, well, suppose it is. All I wanted to say was, that your judgment as to my married life is founded upon nothing but current gossip.

MANDERS. Well, perhaps it is. And what then?

MRS. ALVING. Well, then, Mr. Manders — I will tell you the truth. I have sworn to myself that one day you should know it — you alone!

MANDERS. And what is the truth, then?

MRS. ALVING. The truth is that my husband died just as dissolute as he had lived all his days.

MANDERS [*feeling after a chair*] What do you say?

MRS. ALVING. After nineteen years of marriage, as dissolute — in his desires at any rate — as he was before you married us.

MANDERS. And those — those wild oats, those irregularities, those excesses if you like, you call a "dissolute life"?

MRS. ALVING. Our doctor used the expression.

MANDERS. I don't understand you.

MRS. ALVING. Nor need you.

MANDERS. It almost makes me dizzy. All your married life, the seeming union of all these years, was nothing more than a hidden abyss!

MRS. ALVING. Nothing more. Now you know.

MANDERS. This is — it will take me long to accustom myself to the thought. I can't grasp it. I can't realize it. But how was it possible —? How could such a state of things be kept dark?

MRS. ALVING. That has been my ceaseless struggle, day after day. After Oswald's birth, I thought Alving seemed to be a little better. But it did not last long. And then I had to struggle twice as hard, fighting for life or death, so that nobody should know what sort of a man my child's father was. And you know what power Alving had of winning people's hearts. Nobody seemed able to believe anything but good of him. He was one of those people whose

life does not bite upon their reputation. But at last, Mr. Manders — for you must know the whole story — the most repulsive thing of all happened.

MANDERS. More repulsive than the rest?

MRS. ALVING. I had gone on bearing with him, although I knew very well the secrets of his life out of doors. But when he brought the scandal within our own walls —

MANDERS. Impossible! Here!

MRS. ALVING. Yes; here in our own home. It was in there [*pointing toward the first door on the right*], in the dining-room, that I first got to know of it. I was busy with something in there, and the door was standing a-jar. I heard our housemaid come up from the garden, with water for yonder flowers.

MANDERS. Well —?

MRS. ALVING. Soon after I heard Alving come too. I heard him say something softly to her. And then I heard — [*with a short laugh*] oh! it still sounds in my ears so hatefully and yet so laughably — I heard my own servant-maid whisper, "Let me go, Mr. Alving! Let me be."

MANDERS. What unseemly levity on his part! But it cannot have been more than levity, Mrs. Alving; believe me, it cannot.

MRS. ALVING. I soon got to know what to believe. Mr. Alving had his way with the girl; and that connection had consequences, Mr. Manders.

MANDERS [*as though petrified*] Such things in this house! in this house!

MRS. ALVING. I had borne a great deal in this house. To keep him at home in the evenings — and at night — I had to make myself his boon-companion in his secret orgies up in his room. There I have had to sit alone with him, to clink

glasses and drink with him, and listen to his ribald, silly talk. I have had to fight with him to get him dragged to bed —

MANDERS [*moved*] And you were able to bear all that?

MRS. ALVING. I had my little son to bear it for. But when the last insult was added; when my own servant-maid — Then I swore to myself: This shall come to an end. And so I took the upper hand in the house — the whole control over him and over everything else. For now I had a weapon against him, you see; he dared not oppose me. It was then that Oswald was sent from home. He was in his seventh year, and was beginning to observe and ask questions, as children do. That I could not bear. I thought the child must get poisoned by merely breathing the air in this polluted home. That was why I placed him out. And now you can see, too, why he was never allowed to set foot inside his home so long as his father lived. No one knows what it has cost me.

MANDERS. You have indeed had a life of trial.

MRS. ALVING. I could never have borne it if I had not had my work. For I may truly say that I have worked! All these additions to the estate — all the improvements — all the useful appliances that won Alving such general praise — do you suppose *he* had energy for anything of the sort? — he who lay all day on the sofa and read an old court guide! No; this I will tell you too: it was I who urged him on when he had his better intervals; it was I who had to drag the whole load when he relapsed into his evil ways, or sank into querulous wretchedness.

MANDERS. And it is to that man you raise a memorial?

MRS. ALVING. There you see the power of a bad conscience.

MANDERS. A bad —? What do you mean?

MRS. ALVING. It always seemed to me impossible but that the truth must come out and be believed. So the Asylum was to deaden all rumors and banish doubt.

MANDERS. In that you have certainly not missed your aim, Mrs. Alving.

MRS. ALVING. And besides, I had one other reason. I did not wish that Oswald, my own boy, should inherit anything whatever from his father.

MANDERS. Then it is Alving's fortune that —?

MRS. ALVING. Yes. The sums which I have spent upon the Orphanage, year by year, make up the amount — I have reckoned it up precisely — the amount which made Lieutenant Alving a good match in his day.

MANDERS. I don't quite understand —

MRS. ALVING. It was my purchase-money. I do not choose that that money should pass into Oswald's hands. My son shall have everything from me — everything. [*Oswald Alving enters through the second door to the right; he has taken off his hat and overcoat in the hall. Mrs. Alving goes toward him*] Are you back again already? my dear, dear boy!

OSWALD. Yes. What can a fellow do out of doors in this eternal rain? But I hear dinner's ready. That's capital!

REGINA [*with a parcel, from the dining-room*] A parcel has come for you, Mrs. Alving. [*Hands it to her.*]

MRS. ALVING [*with a glance at Mr. Manders*] No doubt copies of the ode for to-morrow's ceremony.

MANDERS. H'm —

REGINA. And dinner is ready.

MRS. ALVING. Very well. We will come presently. I will just — [*Begins to open the parcel.*]

REGINA [*to Oswald*] Would Mr. Alving like red or white wine?

OSWALD. Both, if you please.

REGINA. *Bien!* Very well, sir. [*She goes into the dining-room.*]

OSWALD. I may as well help to uncork it. [*He also goes into the dining-room, the door of which swings half open behind him.*]

MRS. ALVING [*who has opened the parcel*] Yes, as I thought. Here is the ceremonial ode, Pastor Manders.

MANDERS [*with folded hands*] How I'm to deliver my discourse to-morrow without embarrassment —

MRS. ALVING. Oh! you'll get through it somehow.

MANDERS [*softly, so as not to be heard in the dining-room*] Yes; it would not do to provoke scandal.

MRS. ALVING [*under her breath, but firmly*] No. But then this long, hateful comedy will be ended. From the day after to-morrow it shall be for me as though he who is dead had never lived in this house. No one shall be here but my boy and his mother. [*From within the dining-room comes the noise of a chair overturned, and at the same moment is heard:*]

REGINA [*sharply, but whispering*] Oswald! take care! are you mad? let me go!

MRS. ALVING [*starts in terror*] Ah! [*She stares wildly toward the half-opened door. Oswald is heard coughing and humming inside. A bottle is uncorked.*]

MANDERS [*excited*] What in the world is the matter? What is it, Mrs. Alving?

MRS. ALVING [*hoarsely*] Ghosts! The couple from the conservatory has risen again!

MANDERS. What! Is it possible! Regina? Is she —

MRS. ALVING. Yes. Come. Not another word! [*She seizes Mr. Manders by the arm, and walks unsteadily toward the dining-room.*]

CURTAIN.

ACT TWO.

The same room. The mist still lies heavy over the landscape. Manders and Mrs. Alving enter from the dining-room.

MRS. ALVING [*still in the doorway*] *Velbekomme,** Mr. Manders [*Turns back toward the dining-room*] Aren't you coming too, Oswald?

OSWALD [*from within*] No, thank you. I think I shall go out a little.

MRS. ALVING. Yes, do. The weather seems brighter now. [*She shuts the dining-room door, goes to the hall door, and calls*] Regina!

REGINA [*outside*] Yes, Mrs. Alving.

MRS. ALVING. Go down into the laundry, and help with the garlands.

REGINA. I'll go directly, Mrs. Alving. [*Mrs. Alving assures herself that Regina goes; then shuts the door.*]

MANDERS. I suppose he can't overhear us in there?

MRS. ALVING. Not when the door is shut. Besides, he is just going out.

MANDERS. I am still quite upset. I can't think how I could get down a bit of dinner.

MRS. ALVING [*controlling her nervousness, walks up and down*] No more can I. But what is to be done now?

MANDERS. Yes; what is to be done? Upon my honor,

* A phrase equivalent to the German *Prosit die Mahlzeit*—"May good digestion wait on appetite."

I don't know. I am so utterly inexperienced in matters of this sort.

MRS. ALVING. I am quite convinced that, so far, no mischief has been done.

MANDERS. No; Heaven forbid! But it is an unseemly state of things, nevertheless.

MRS. ALVING. The whole thing is an idle fancy of Oswald's; you may be sure of that.

MANDERS. Well, as I say, I'm not accustomed to affairs of the kind. But I should certainly think —

MRS. ALVING. Out of the house she must go, and that immediately. It is as clear as daylight.

MANDERS. Yes, of course she must.

MRS. ALVING. But where to? It would not be right to —

MANDERS. Where to? Home to her father, of course.

MRS. ALVING. To whom did you say?

MANDERS. To her — But then, Engstrand is not — ? Good God, Mrs. Alving, how is that possible? You must be mistaken, after all.

MRS. ALVING. Alas! I'm mistaken in nothing. Johanna confessed all to me, and Alving could not deny it. So there was nothing to be done but to get the matter hushed up.

MANDERS. No, you could do nothing else.

MRS. ALVING. The girl left our service at once, and got a good sum of money to hold her tongue for the time. The rest she managed for herself when she got into the town. She renewed her old acquaintance with Engstrand, the carpenter, gave him to understand, I've no doubt, how much money she had got, and told him some tale about a foreigner who put in here with a yacht that summer. So she and

Engstrand got married in hot haste. Why, you married them yourself.

MANDERS. But then how to account for — ? I recollect distinctly Engstrand coming to give notice of the marriage. He was broken down with contrition, and blamed himself so bitterly for the misbehavior he and his sweetheart had been guilty of.

MRS. ALVING. Yes; of course he had to take the blame upon himself.

MANDERS. But such a piece of duplicity on his part! And toward me, too! I certainly never could have believed it of Jacob Engstrand. Ah! I shall not fail to give him a serious talking to; he may be sure of that. And then the immorality of such a connection! For money! What was the sum the girl had given her?

MRS. ALVING. It was three hundred dollars.

MANDERS. There! think of that! for a miserable three hundred dollars to go and marry a fallen woman!

MRS. ALVING. Then what have you to say of me? I went and married a fallen man.

MANDERS. But — good heavens! — what are you talking about? A fallen man?

MRS. ALVING. Do you think Alving was any purer when I went with him to the altar than Johanna was when Engstrand married her?

MANDERS. Well, but there's a world of difference between the two cases —

MRS. ALVING. Not so much difference after all, except in the price — a wretched three hundred dollars and a whole fortune.

MANDERS. How can you compare the two cases? You

had taken counsel with your own heart and with your friends.

MRS. ALVING [*without looking at him*] I thought you understood where what you call my heart had strayed to at the time.

MANDERS [*distantly*] Had I understood anything of the kind, I should not have continued a daily guest in your husband's house.

MRS. ALVING. Well, the fact remains that with myself I took no counsel whatever.

MANDERS. Well, then, with your nearest relatives — as your duty bade you — with your mother and both your aunts.

MRS. ALVING. Yes, that is true. Those three cast up the account for me. Oh! it's marvelous how clearly they made out that it would be downright madness to refuse such an offer. If mother could only see me now and know what all that grandeur has come to.

MANDERS. Nobody can be held responsible for the result. This, at least, remains clear: your marriage was in accordance with law and order.

MRS. ALVING [*at the window*] Oh! that perpetual law and order! I often think it is that which does all the mischief here in the world.

MANDERS. Mrs. Alving, that is a sinful way of talking.

MRS. ALVING. Well, I can't help it; I can endure all this constraint and cowardice no longer. It is too much for me. I must work my way out to freedom.

MANDERS. What do you mean by that?

MRS. ALVING [*drumming on the window-sill*] I ought never to have concealed the facts of Alving's life. But at that time I dared do nothing else—even for my own sake. I was such a coward.

MANDERS. A coward?

MRS. ALVING. If people had got to know anything, they would have said — "Poor man! with a runaway wife, no wonder he kicks over the traces."

MANDERS. Such remarks might have been made with a certain show of right.

MRS. ALVING [*looking steadily at him*] If I were what I ought to be, I should go to Oswald and say, "Listen, my boy; your father was self-indulgent and vicious — "

MANDERS. Merciful heavens — !

MRS. ALVING. And then I should tell him all I have told you — every word of it.

MANDERS. The idea is shocking, Mrs. Alving.

MRS. ALVING. Yes; I know that. I know that very well. I am myself shocked at it. [*Goes away from the window*] I am such a coward.

MANDERS. You call it "cowardice" to do your plain duty? Have you forgotten that a son should love and honor his father and mother?

MRS. ALVING. Don't let us talk in such general terms. Let us ask: Should Oswald love and honor Chamberlain Alving?

MANDERS. Is there no voice in your mother's heart that forbids you to destroy your son's ideals?

MRS. ALVING. But what about the truth?

MANDERS. But what about the ideals?

MRS. ALVING. Oh! Ideals! Ideals! If I only weren't such a coward as I am!

MANDERS. Do not despise ideals, Mrs. Alving; they will avenge themselves cruelly. Take Oswald's case; he, unfortunately, seems to have few enough ideals as it is;

but I can see that his father stands before him as an ideal.

MRS. ALVING. You are right there.

MANDERS. And this conception of his father you have yourself implanted and fostered in his mind by your letters.

MRS. ALVING. Yes; in my superstitious awe for Duty and Decency I lied to my boy, year after year. Oh! what a coward, what a coward I have been!

MANDERS. You have established a happy illusion in your son's heart, Mrs. Alving, and assuredly you ought not to undervalue it.

MRS. ALVING. H'm; who knows whether it is so happy after all — ? But, at any rate, I won't have any goings-on with Regina. He shall not go and ruin the poor girl.

MANDERS. No; good God! that would be dreadful!

MRS. ALVING. If I knew he was in earnest, and that it would be for his happiness —

MANDERS. What? What then?

MRS. ALVING. But it could not be; for I'm sorry to say Regina is not a girl to make him happy.

MANDERS. Well, what then? What do you mean?

MRS. ALVING. If I were not such a pitiful coward, I would say to him, "Marry her, or make what arrangement you please, only let us have no deception."

MANDERS. But, good heavens! would you let them *marry!* anything so dreadful — so unheard of — !

MRS. ALVING. Do you really mean "unheard of?" Frankly, Pastor Manders, do you suppose that throughout the country there are not plenty of married couples as closely akin as they?

MANDERS. I don't in the least understand you.

MRS. ALVING. Oh, yes, indeed you do.

MANDERS. Ah, you are thinking of the possibility that

— Yes! alas! family life is certainly not always so pure as it ought to be. But in such a case as you point to one can never know — at least with any certainty. Here, on the other hand — that you, a mother, can think of letting your son —

MRS. ALVING. But I can't — I would not for anything in the world; that is precisely what I am saying.

MANDERS. No, because you are a "coward," as you put it. But if you were not a "coward," then — ? Good God! a connection so shocking!

MRS. ALVING. So far as that goes, they say we are all sprung from connections of that sort. And who is it arranged the world so, Pastor Manders?

MANDERS. Questions of that sort I must decline to discuss with you, Mrs. Alving; you are far from being in the right frame of mind for them. But that you dare to call your scruples "cowardly" — !

MRS. ALVING. Let me tell you what I mean. I am timid and half-hearted because I cannot get rid of the Ghosts that haunt me.

MANDERS. What do you say haunts you?

MRS. ALVING. Ghosts! When I heard Regina and Oswald in there, it was as though I saw Ghosts before me. But I almost think we are all of us Ghosts, Pastor Manders. It is not only what we have inherited from our father and mother that "walks" in us. It is all sorts of dead ideas, and lifeless old beliefs, and so forth. They have no vitality, but they cling to us all the same, and we can't get rid of them. Whenever I take up a newspaper I seem to see Ghosts gliding between the lines. There must be Ghosts all the country over, as thick as the sand

of the sea. And then we are, one and all, so pitifully afraid of the light.

MANDERS. Ah! here we have the fruits of your reading! And pretty fruits they are, upon my word! Oh! those horrible, revolutionary, free-thinking books!

MRS. ALVING. You are mistaken, my dear Pastor. It was you yourself who set me thinking; and I thank you for it with all my heart.

MANDERS. I?

MRS. ALVING. Yes. When you forced me under the yoke you called Duty and Obligation; when you praised as right and proper what my whole soul rebelled against, as something loathsome. It was then that I began to look into the seams of your doctrine. I only wished to pick at a single knot; but when I had got that undone, the whole thing raveled out. And then I understood that it was all machine-sewn.

MANDERS [*softly, with emotion*] And was that the upshot of my life's hardest battle?

MRS. ALVING. Call it, rather, your most pitiful defeat.

MANDERS. It was my greatest victory, Helen.— the victory over myself.

MRS. ALVING. It was a crime against us both.

MANDERS. When you went astray, and came to me crying, "Here I am; take me!" I commanded you, saying — "Woman, go home to your lawful husband." Was that a crime?

MRS. ALVING. Yes, I think so.

MANDERS. We two do not understand each other.

MRS. ALVING. Not now, at any rate.

MANDERS. Never — never in my most secret thoughts have I regarded you otherwise than as another's wife.

MRS. ALVING. Oh! — indeed?

MANDERS. Helen — !

MRS. ALVING. People so easily forget their past selves.

MANDERS. I do not. I am what I always was.

MRS. ALVING [*changing the subject*] Well, well, well; don't let us talk of old times any longer. You are now over head and ears in Commissions and Boards of Direction, and I am fighting my fight with Ghosts both within me and without.

MANDERS. Those without I shall help you to lay. After all the shocking things I have heard from you to-day, I cannot in conscience permit an unprotected girl to remain in your house.

MRS. ALVING. Don't you think it would be the best plan to get her provided for? — I mean, by a good marriage.

MANDERS. No doubt. I think it would be desirable for her in every respect. Regina is just now at the age when — Of course I don't know much about these things, but —

MRS. ALVING. Regina matured very early.

MANDERS. Yes! did she not? I have an impression that she was remarkably well developed, physically, when I prepared her for confirmation. But, in the meantime, she must go home, under her father's eye — Ah! but Engstrand is not — That he — that *he* could so hide the truth from me! [*A knock at the door into the hall.*]

MRS. ALVING. Who can that be? Come in!

ENGSTRAND [*in his Sunday clothes, in the doorway*] I beg your pardon humbly, but —

MANDERS. Ah! H'm —

MRS. ALVING. Is that you, Engstrand?

ENGSTRAND. There was none of the servants about, so I took the great liberty of just knocking.

MRS. ALVING. Oh! very well. Come in. Is there anything you want to speak to me about?

ENGSTRAND [*comes in*] No; I'm greatly obliged to you; it was with his Reverence I wanted to have a word or two.

MANDERS [*walking up and down the room*] H'm — indeed! You want to speak to me, do you?

ENGSTRAND. Yes, I should like so very much to —

MANDERS [*stops in front of him*] Well — may I ask what you want?

ENGSTRAND. Well, it was just this, your Reverence; we've been paid off down yonder — my grateful thanks to you, ma'am. And now everything's finished, I've been thinking it would be but right and proper if we, that have been working so honestly together all this time — well, I was thinking we ought to end up with a little prayer-meeting to-night.

MANDERS. A prayer-meeting? Down at the Orphanage?

ENGSTRAND. Oh, if your Reverence doesn't think it proper —

MANDERS. Oh, yes! I do; but — h'm —

ENGSTRAND. I've been in the habit of offering up a little prayer in the evening, myself.

MRS. ALVING. Have you?

ENGSTRAND. Yes, every now and then — just a little exercise, you might call it. But I am a poor, common man, and have little enough gift, God help me! and so I thought, as the Reverend Mr. Manders happened to be here, I'd —

MANDERS. Well, you see, Engstrand, I must first ask you a question. Are you in the right frame of mind for

such a meeting? Do you feel your conscience clear and at ease?

ENGSTRAND. Oh! God help us! your Reverence, we'd better not talk about conscience.

MANDERS. Yes, that's just what we must talk about. What have you to answer?

ENGSTRAND. Why — one's conscience — it can be bad enough now and then.

MANDERS. Ah, you admit that. Then will you make a clean breast of it, and tell the truth about Regina?

MRS. ALVING [*quickly*] Mr. Manders!

MANDERS [*reassuringly*] Just let me —

ENGSTRAND. About Regina! Lord! how you frighten me! [*Looks at Mrs. Alving*] There's nothing wrong about Regina, is there?

MANDERS. We will hope not. But I mean, what is the truth about you and Regina? You pass for her father, eh?

ENGSTRAND [*uncertain*] Well — h'm — your Reverence knows all about me and poor Johanna.

MANDERS. Come, no more prevarication! Your wife told Mrs. Alving the whole story before quitting her service.

ENGSTRAND. Well, then, may — ! Now, did she really?

MANDERS. So you are found out, Engstrand.

ENGSTRAND. And she swore and took her Bible oath —

MANDERS. Did she take her Bible oath?

ENGSTRAND. No; she only swore; but she did it so earnestly.

MANDERS. And you have hidden the truth from me all these years? Hidden it from me! from me, who have trusted you without reserve, in everything.

ENGSTRAND. Well, I can't deny it.

MANDERS. Have I deserved this of you, Engstrand?

Haven't I always been ready to help you in word and deed, so far as it stood in my power? Answer me. Have I not?

ENGSTRAND. It would have been a poor look-out for me many a time but for the Reverend Mr. Manders.

MANDERS. And you reward me thus! You cause me to enter falsehoods in the Church Register, and you withhold from me, year after year, the explanations you owed alike to me and to truth. Your conduct has been wholly inexcusable, Engstrand; and from this time forward all is over between us.

ENGSTRAND [*with a sigh*] Yes! I suppose it must be.

MANDERS. How can you possibly justify yourself?

ENGSTRAND. How could I think that she had made bad worse by talking about it? Will your Reverence just fancy yourself in the same trouble as poor Johanna —

MANDERS. I!

ENGSTRAND. Lord bless you! I don't mean so exactly the same. But I mean, if your Reverence had anything to be ashamed of in the eyes of the world, as the saying is — We men oughtn't to judge a poor woman too hardly, your Reverence.

MANDERS. I am not doing so, it is you I am reproaching.

ENGSTRAND. Might I make so bold as to ask your Reverence a bit of a question?

MANDERS. Yes, ask away.

ENGSTRAND. Isn't it right and proper for a man to raise up the fallen?

MANDERS. Most certainly it is.

ENGSTRAND. And isn't a man bound to keep his sacred word?

MANDERS. Why! of course he is; but —

ENGSTRAND. When Johanna had got into trouble

through that Englishman—or it might have been an American or a Russian, as they call them — well, you see, she came down into the town. Poor thing! she'd sent me about my business once or twice before, for she couldn't bear the sight of anything but what was handsome; and I'd got this damaged leg. Your Reverence recollects how I ventured up into a dancing-saloon, where seafaring people carried on with drink and devilry, as the saying goes. And then, when I was for giving them a bit of an admonition to lead a new life —

MRS. ALVING [*at the window*] H'm —

MANDERS. I know all about that, Engstrand; these ruffians threw you downstairs. You have told me of the affair already.

ENGSTRAND. I am not puffed up about it, your Reverence. But what I wanted to tell was, that then she came and confessed all to me, with weeping and gnashing of teeth, I can tell your Reverence I was sore at heart to hear it.

MANDERS. Were you indeed, Engstrand? Well, go on.

ENGSTRAND. So I said to her, "The American, he's sailing about on the boundless sea. And as for you, Johanna," said I, "you've committed a grievous sin and you're a fallen creature. But Jacob Engstrand," said I, "he's got two good legs to stand upon, *he* has — " You know, your Reverence, I was speaking figuratively-like.

MANDERS. I understand quite well. Go on.

ENGSTRAND. Well, that was how I raised her up and made an honest woman of her, so that folks shouldn't get to know how she'd gone astray with foreigners.

MANDERS. All that was very good of you. Only I can't approve of your stooping to take money —

ENGSTRAND. Money? I? Not a farthing!

MANDERS [*inquiringly to Mrs. Alving*] But —

ENGSTRAND. Oh! wait a minute; now I recollect. Johanna had a trifle of money. But I would have nothing to do with it. "No," said I, "that's mammon; that's the wages of sin. This dirty gold — or notes, or whatever it was — we'll just fling that back to the American," said I. But he was gone and away, over the stormy sea, your Reverence.

MANDERS. Was he really, my good fellow?

ENGSTRAND. Aye, sir. So Johanna and I, we agreed that the money should go to the child's education; and so it did, and I can give account for every blessed farthing of it.

MANDERS. Why! This alters the case considerably.

ENGSTRAND. That's just how it stands, your Reverence. And I make so bold as to say I've been an honest father to Regina, so far as my poor strength went; for I'm but a poor creature, worse luck!

MANDERS. Well, well, my good fellow —

ENGSTRAND. But I may make bold to say that I have brought up the child, and lived kindly with poor Johanna, and ruled over my own house, as the Scripture has it. But I could never think of going up to your Reverence and puffing myself up and boasting because I, too, had done some good in the world. No, sir; when anything of that sort happens to Jacob Engstrand, he holds his tongue about it. It doesn't happen so very often, I dare say. And when I do come to see your Reverence, I find a mortal deal to say about what's wicked and weak. For I do say — as I was saying just now — one's conscience isn't always as clean as it might be.

MANDERS. Give me your hand, Jacob Engstrand.

ENGSTRAND. Oh Lord! your Reverence —

MANDERS. Come, no nonsense. [*Wrings his hand*] There we are!

ENGSTRAND. And if I might humbly beg your Reverence's pardon —

MANDERS. You? On the contrary, it is I who ought to beg your pardon.

ENGSTRAND. Lord, no, sir!

MANDERS. Yes, certainly. And I do it with all my heart. Forgive me for misunderstanding you. And I wish I could give you some proof of my hearty regret, and of my good-will toward you.

ENGSTRAND. Would your Reverence?

MANDERS. With the greatest pleasure.

ENGSTRAND. Well, then, there's the very opportunity now. With the money I've saved here, I was thinking I might found a Sailors' Home down in the town.

MRS. ALVING. *You* want to?

ENGSTRAND. Yes; it, too, might be a sort of Orphanage, in a manner of speaking. There are many temptations for sea-faring folk ashore. But in this little house of mine, a man might feel as under a father's eye, I was thinking.

MANDERS. What do you say to this, Mrs. Alving?

ENGSTRAND. It isn't much I've got to start with, the Lord help me! But if I could only find a helping hand, why —

MANDERS. Yes, yes; we'll look into the matter. I entirely approve of your plan. But now, go before me and make everything ready, and get the candles lighted, so as to give the place an air of festivity. And then we will pass an edifying hour together, my good fellow; for now I quite believe you are in the right frame of mind.

ENGSTRAND. Yes, I trust I am. And so I'll say good-by, Ma'am, and thank you kindly; and take good care of Regina for me [*wipes a tear from his eye*] — poor Johanna's child; h'm, that's an odd thing, now; but it's just as if she'd grown into the very core of my heart. It is indeed. [*He bows and goes out through the hall.*]

MANDERS. Well, what do you say about that man now, Mrs. Alving? That threw a totally different light on matters, didn't it?

MRS. ALVING. Yes, it certainly did.

MANDERS. It only shows you how excessively careful one must be in judging one's fellow-creatures. But it's a great joy to ascertain that one has been mistaken. Don't you think so?

MRS. ALVING. I think that you are, and will remain, a great baby, Manders.

MANDERS. I?

MRS. ALVING [*laying both hands upon his shoulder*] And I say that I have half a mind to put my arms round your neck, and kiss you.

MANDERS [*stepping hastily back*] No, no; God bless us! What an idea!

MRS. ALVING [*with a smile*] Oh! you need not be afraid of me.

MANDERS [*by the table*] You have sometimes such an exaggerated way of expressing yourself. Now, I'll just collect all the documents, and put them in my bag. [*He does so*] There, now. And now, good-by for the present. Keep your eyes open when Oswald comes back. I shall look in again later. [*He takes his hat and goes out through the hall door.*]

MRS. ALVING [*heaves a sigh, looks for a moment out of*

the window, sets the room in order a little, and is about to go into the dining-room, but stops at the door with a half-surprised cry] Oswald, are you still at table?

Oswald [*in the dining-room*] I am only finishing my cigar.

Mrs. Alving. I thought you had gone for a little walk.

Oswald. In such weather as this? [*A glass clinks. Mrs. Alving leaves the door open, and sits down with her knitting on the sofa by the window*] Wasn't that Pastor Manders who went away just now?

Mrs. Alving. Yes; he went down to the Orphanage.

Oswald. H'm. [*The glass and decanter click again.*]

Mrs. Alving [*with a troubled glance*] Dear Oswald, you should take care of that liqueur. It is strong.

Oswald. It keeps out the damp.

Mrs. Alving. Wouldn't you rather come in to me?

Oswald. I mayn't smoke in there.

Mrs. Alving. You know quite well that you may smoke cigars.

Oswald. Oh! all right, then; I'll come in. Just a tiny drop more first! There! [*He comes into the room with his cigar, and shuts the door after him. A short silence*] Where's Manders gone to?

Mrs. Alving. I've just told you; he went down to the Orphanage.

Oswald. Oh, ah; so you did.

Mrs. Alving. You shouldn't sit so long at table after dinner, Oswald.

Oswald [*holding his cigar behind him*] But I find it so pleasant, mother. [*Strokes and pets her*] Just think what it is for me to come home and sit at mother's own table, in mother's room, and eat mother's delicious dinner.

MRS. ALVING. My dear, dear boy!

OSWALD [*somewhat impatiently, walks about and smokes*] And what else can I do with myself here? I can't set to work at anything.

MRS. ALVING. Why can't you?

OSWALD. In such weather as this? Without a single ray of sunlight the whole day? [*Walks up the room*] Oh! not to be able to work!

MRS. ALVING. Perhaps it was not quite wise of you to come home.

OSWALD. Oh, yes, mother; I had to.

MRS. ALVING. Why? I would ten times rather forego the joy of having you here than —

OSWALD [*stops beside the table*] Now just tell me, mother; does it really make you so very happy to have me home again?

MRS. ALVING. *Does* it make me happy?

OSWALD [*crumpling up a newspaper*] I should have thought it must be pretty much the same to you whether I was in existence or not.

MRS. ALVING. Have you the heart to say that to your mother, Oswald?

OSWALD. But you've got on very well without me all this time.

MRS. ALVING. Yes; I've got on without you. That is true. [*A silence. Twilight gradually falls. Oswald walks to and fro across the room. He has laid his cigar down.*]

OSWALD [*stops beside Mrs. Alving*] Mother, may I sit down on the sofa by you?

MRS. ALVING [*makes room for him*] Yes; do, my dear boy.

OSWALD [*sits down*] Now I am going to tell you something, mother.

MRS. ALVING [*anxiously*] Well?

OSWALD [*looks fixedly before him*] For I can't go on hiding it any longer.

MRS. ALVING. Hiding what? What is it?

OSWALD [*as before*] I could never bring myself to write to you about it; and since I've come home —

MRS. ALVING [*seizes him by the arm*] Oswald, what *is* the matter?

OSWALD [*as before*] Both yesterday and to-day I have tried to put the thoughts away from me — to get free from them; but it won't do.

MRS. ALVING [*rising*] Now you must speak out, Oswald.

OSWALD [*draws her down to the sofa again*] Sit still, and then I will try and tell you. I complained of fatigue after my journey —

MRS. ALVING. Well, what then?

OSWALD. But it isn't that that's the matter with me; it isn't any ordinary fatigue —

MRS. ALVING [*tries to jump up*] You're not ill, Oswald?

OSWALD [*draws her down again*] Do sit still, mother. Only take it quietly. I am not downright ill, either; not what is commonly called "ill." [*Clasps his hands above his head*] Mother, my mind is broken down — ruined — I shall never be able to work again. [*With his hands before his face, he buries his head in her lap, and breaks into bitter sobbing.*]

MRS. ALVING [*white and trembling*] Oswald! look at me! No, no; it isn't true.

OSWALD [*looks up with despair in his eyes*] Never be

able to work again. Never, never! It will be like living death! Mother, can you imagine anything so horrible?

MRS. ALVING. My poor boy! How has this horrible thing come over you?

OSWALD [*sits upright*] That's just what I can't possibly grasp or understand. I have never led an unsteady life — never, in any respect. You must not believe that of me, mother. I have never done that.

MRS. ALVING. I'm sure you haven't, Oswald.

OSWALD. And yet this has come over me just the same — this awful misfortune!

MRS. ALVING. Oh! but it will pass away, my dear, blessed boy. It is nothing but overwork. Trust me, I am right.

OSWALD [*sadly*] I thought so too at first; but it isn't so.

MRS. ALVING. Tell me the whole story from beginning to end.

OSWALD. Well, I will.

MRS. ALVING. When did you first notice it?

OSWALD. It was directly after I had been home last time, and had got back to Paris again. I began to feel the most violent pains in my head — chiefly in the back of my head, I thought. It was as though a tight iron ring was being screwed round my neck and upward.

MRS. ALVING. Well, and then?

OSWALD. At first I thought it was nothing but the ordinary headache I had been so plagued with when I was growing up —

MRS. ALVING. Yes, yes —

OSWALD. But it was not that. I soon found that out. I couldn't work. I wanted to begin upon a big new picture, but it was as though my powers failed me; all my strength

was crippled; I could not form any definite images; it all swam before me — whirling round and round. Oh! it was an awful state! At last I sent for a doctor, and from him I got to know the truth.

MRS. ALVING. How do you mean?

OSWALD. He was one of the first doctors in Paris. I told him my symptoms, and then he set to work asking me a heap of questions which I thought had nothing to do with the matter. I couldn't imagine what the man was after —

MRS. ALVING. Well?

OSWALD. At last he said: "You have been worm-eaten from your birth." He used that very word — *vermoulu.*

MRS. ALVING [*breathlessly*] What did he mean by that?

OSWALD. I didn't understand either, and begged of him to give me a clearer explanation. And then the old cynic said — [*Clenching his fist*] Oh! —

MRS. ALVING. What did he say?

OSWALD. He said, "The sins of the fathers are visited upon the children."

MRS. ALVING [*rising slowly*] The sins of the fathers —

OSWALD. I very nearly struck him in the face —

MRS. ALVING [*walks away across the floor*] The sins of the fathers —

OSWALD [*smiles sadly*] Yes; what do you think of that? Of course I assured him that such a thing was out of the question. But do you think he gave in? No, he stuck to it; and it was only when I produced your letters and translated to him the passages relating to father —

MRS. ALVING. But then?

OSWALD. Then he was of course bound to admit that he was on the wrong track, and so I got to know the truth — the incomprehensible truth! I ought to have held aloof from

my bright and happy student-life among my fellows. It has been too much for my strength. So I had brought it upon myself.

MRS. ALVING. Oswald! Oh, no! don't believe it.

OSWALD. No other explanation was possible, he said. That is the awful part of it. Incurably ruined for my whole life — by my own heedlessness! All that I meant to have done in the world — I never dare think of again. I am not *able* to think of it. Oh! if I could but live over again, and undo all I have done! [*He buries his face in the sofa. Mrs. Alving wrings her hands and walks, in silent struggle, backward and forward. Oswald, after a while, looks up and remains resting upon his elbow*] If it had only been something inherited, something one wasn't responsible for! But this! To have thrown away so shamefully, thoughtlessly, recklessly, one's own happiness, one's own health, everything in the world — one's future, one's very life!

MRS. ALVING. No, no, my dear, darling boy! It is impossible. [*Bends over him*] Things are not so desperate as you think.

OSWALD. Oh! you don't know — [*Springs up*] And then, mother, to cause you all this sorrow! Many a time have I almost wished and hoped that at bottom you did not care so very much about me.

MRS. ALVING. I, Oswald? my only boy! You are all I have in the world! The only thing I care about!

OSWALD [*seizes both her hands and kisses them*] Yes, mother, dear, I see it well enough. When I am at home, I see it, of course; and that is the hardest part for me. But now you know all about it, and now we won't talk any more

about it to-day. I daren't think about it for long together. [*Goes up the room*] Get me something to drink, mother.

MRS. ALVING. Drink? What do you want to drink now?

OSWALD. Oh! anything you like. You've got some cold punch in the house.

MRS. ALVING. Yes, but my dear Oswald —

OSWALD. Don't refuse me, mother. Do be nice, now! I must have something to wash down all these gnawing thoughts. [*Goes into the conservatory*] And then — it is so dark here! [*Mrs. Alving pulls a bell-rope on her right*] And this ceaseless rain! It may go on week after week for months together. Never to get a glimpse of the sun! I can't recollect ever to have seen the sun shine all the times I've been at home.

MRS. ALVING. Oswald, you are thinking of going away from me.

OSWALD [*drawing a deep breath*] I am not thinking of anything. I *can't* think of anything. [*In a low voice*] I left thinking alone.

REGINA [*from the dining-room*] Did you ring, ma'am?

MRS. ALVING. Yes; let us have the lamp in.

REGINA. I will, directly. It is ready lighted. [*Goes out.*]

MRS. ALVING [*goes across to Oswald*] Oswald, be frank with me.

OSWALD. Well, so I am, mother. [*Goes to the table*] I think I have told you enough. [*Regina brings the lamp and sets it upon the table.*]

MRS. ALVING. Regina, you might fetch us half a bottle of champagne.

REGINA. Very well, ma'am. [*Goes out.*]

OSWALD [*puts his arm round Mrs. Alving's neck*] That's just what I wanted. I knew mother wouldn't let her boy be thirsty.

MRS. ALVING. My own, poor, darling Oswald, how could I deny you anything now?

OSWALD [*eagerly*] Is that true, mother? Do you mean it?

MRS. ALVING. How? What?

OSWALD. That you couldn't deny me anything.

MRS. ALVING. My dear Oswald —

OSWALD. Hush!

REGINA [*brings a tray with a half-bottle of champagne and two glasses, which she sets on the table*] Shall I open it?

OSWALD. No, thanks. I'll do it myself. [*Regina walks out again.*]

MRS. ALVING [*sits down by the table*] What was it you meant, I mustn't deny you?

OSWALD [*busy opening the bottle*] First let's have a glass — or two. [*The cork pops; he pours wine into one glass, and is about to pour it into the other.*]

MRS. ALVING [*holding her hand over it*] Thanks; not for me.

OSWALD. Oh! won't you? Then I will! [*He empties the glass, fills and empties it again; then he sits down by the table.*]

MRS. ALVING [*in expectation*] Well?

OSWALD [*without looking at her*] Tell me — I thought you and Pastor Manders looked so odd — well, so awfully quiet at the dinner-table to-day.

MRS. ALVING. Did you notice it?

OSWALD. Yes. H'm — [*After a short silence*] Tell me, what do you think of Regina?

MRS. ALVING. What I think?

OSWALD. Yes; isn't she splendid?

MRS. ALVING. My dear Oswald, you don't know her so well as I do.

OSWALD. Well?

MRS. ALVING. Regina, unfortunately, was allowed to stay at home too long. I ought to have taken her earlier into my house.

OSWALD. Yes, but isn't she splendid to look at, mother? [*He fills his glass.*]

MRS. ALVING. Regina has many serious faults.

OSWALD. Oh, I dare say. What does it matter? [*He drinks again.*]

MRS. ALVING. But I'm fond of her, nevertheless, and I am responsible for her. I wouldn't have any harm happen to her for all the world.

OSWALD [*springs up*] Mother! Regina is my only salvation.

MRS. ALVING [*rising*] What do you mean by that?

OSWALD. I can't go on bearing all this misery of mind alone.

MRS. ALVING. Have you not got your mother to share it with you?

OSWALD. Yes; that's what I thought; and so I came home to you. But that won't do. I see it won't do. I can't endure my life here.

MRS. ALVING. Oswald!

OSWALD. I must live in a different way, mother. That's why I must go away from you. I won't have you looking on at it.

MRS. ALVING. My unhappy boy! But, Oswald, while you are so ill as at present —

OSWALD. If it were only the illness, I should stay with you, mother, you may be sure; for you are the best friend I have in the world.

MRS. ALVING. Yes, indeed I am, Oswald; am I not?

OSWALD [*wanders restlessly about*] But it is all the torment, the remorse; and besides that, the great, crushing dread. Oh! that awful dread!

MRS. ALVING [*walking after him*] Dread; what dread? What do you mean?

OSWALD. Oh! you mustn't ask me any more. I don't know. I can't describe it to you. [*Mrs. Alving goes over to the right and pulls the bell*] What is it you want?

MRS. ALVING. I want my boy to be happy — that is what I want. He shall not go on racking his brains. [*To Regina, who comes in the door*] More champagne — a whole bottle. [*Regina goes.*]

OSWALD. Mother!

MRS. ALVING. Do you think we don't know how to live out here in the country?

OSWALD. Isn't she splendid to look at? How beautifully she's built! And so healthy to the core!

MRS. ALVING [*sits down by the table*] Sit down, Oswald; let us talk quietly together.

OSWALD [*sits down*] I dare say you don't know, mother, that I owe Regina some reparation.

MRS. ALVING. You?

OSWALD. For a bit of thoughtlessness, or whatever you like to call it — very innocent, anyhow. When I was home last time —

MRS. ALVING. Well?

OSWALD. She used so often to ask me about Paris, and I used to tell her one thing and another. Then I recollect I happened to say to her one day, "Wouldn't you like to come down there yourself?"

MRS. ALVING. Well?

OSWALD. I saw that she blushed deeply, and then she said, "Yes, I should like it of all things." "Ah! well," I replied, "it might perhaps be managed" — or something like that.

MRS. ALVING. And then?

OSWALD. Of course I had forgotten the whole thing; but the day before yesterday I happened to ask her whether she was glad I was to stay at home so long ——

MRS. ALVING. Yes?

OSWALD. And then she looked so strangely at me and asked, "But what is to become of my trip to Paris?"

MRS. ALVING. Her trip!

OSWALD. And so I got out of her that she had taken the thing seriously; that she had been thinking of me the whole time; and had set to work to learn French —

MRS. ALVING. So that was why she did it!

OSWALD. Mother! when I saw that fresh, lovely, splendid girl standing there before me — till then I had hardly noticed her — but when she stood there as though with open arms ready to receive me —

MRS. ALVING. Oswald!

OSWALD. Then it flashed upon me that my salvation was in her; for I saw that she was full of the joy of life.*

MRS. ALVING [*starts*] The joy of life? Can there be salvation in that?

REGINA [*from the dining-room, with a bottle of cham-*

* "Livsglæde"—*la joie de vivre.*

pagne] I'm sorry to have been so long, but I had to go to the cellar. [*Puts the bottle on the table.*]

OSWALD. And now fetch another glass.

REGINA [*looks at him in surprise*] There is Mrs. Alving's glass, Mr. Alving.

OSWALD. Yes, but fetch one for yourself, Regina. [*Regina starts and gives a lightning-like side-glance at Mrs. Alving*] Why do you wait?

REGINA [*softly and hesitatingly*] Is it Mrs. Alving's wish?

MRS. ALVING. Fetch the glass, Regina. [*Regina goes out into the dining-room.*]

OSWALD [*follows her with his eyes*] Have you noticed how she walks? — so firmly and lightly!

MRS. ALVING. It can never be, Oswald.

OSWALD. It's a settled thing. Can't you see that? It is no use to say anything against it. [*Regina enters with an empty glass, which she keeps in her hand*] Sit down, Regina. [*Regina looks inquiringly at Mrs. Alving.*]

MRS. ALVING. Sit down. [*Regina sits down on a chair by the dining-room door, still holding the empty glass in her hand*] Oswald, what were you saying about the joy of life?

OSWALD. Ah, the joy of life, mother; that's a thing you don't know much about in these parts. I have never felt it here.

MRS. ALVING. Not when you are with me?

OSWALD. Not when I'm at home. But you don't understand that.

MRS. ALVING. Yes, yes; I think I almost understand it — now.

OSWALD. And then, too, the joy of work. At bottom, it's the same thing. But that too you know nothing about.

MRS. ALVING. Perhaps you are right, Oswald; let me hear more about it.

OSWALD. Well, I only mean that here people are brought up to believe that work is a curse and a punishment for sin, and that life is something miserable, something we want to be done with, the sooner the better.

MRS. ALVING. "A vale of tears," yes; and we take care to make it one.

OSWALD. But in the great world people won't hear of such things. There, nobody really believes such doctrines any longer. There, you feel it bliss and ecstasy merely to draw the breath of life. Mother, have you noticed that everything I have painted has turned upon the joy of life? always, always upon the joy of life? — light and sunshine and glorious air, and faces radiant with happiness? That is why I am afraid of remaining at home with you.

MRS. ALVING. Afraid? What are you afraid of here, with me?

OSWALD. I am afraid that all that is germinating in me would develop into ugliness.

MRS. ALVING [*looks steadily at him*] Do you think that would be the way of it?

OSWALD. I know it. You may live the same life here as there, and yet it won't be the same life.

MRS. ALVING [*who has been listening eagerly, rises, her eyes big with thoughts, and says*] Now I see the connection.

OSWALD. What is it you see?

MRS. ALVING. I see it now for the first time. And now I can speak.

OSWALD [*rising*] Mother, I don't understand you.

REGINA [*who has also risen*] Perhaps I ought to go?

MRS. ALVING. No. Stay here. Now I can speak. Now, my boy, you shall know the whole truth. And then you can choose. Oswald! Regina!

OSWALD. Hush! Here's Manders.

MANDERS [*comes in by the hall door*] There! We've had a most edifying time down there.

OSWALD. So have we.

MANDERS. We must stand by Engstrand and his Sailors' Home. Regina must go to him and help him —

REGINA. No, thank you, sir.

MANDERS [*noticing her for the first time*] What? You here? and with a glass in your hand!

REGINA [*hastily putting the glass down*] *Pardon!*

OSWALD. Regina is going with me, Mr. Manders.

MANDERS. Going with you!

OSWALD. Yes; as my wife — if she wishes it.

MANDERS. But, good God — !

REGINA. It's none of my doing, sir.

OSWALD. Or she will stay here, if I stay.

REGINA [*involuntarily*] Here!

MANDERS. I am thunderstruck at your conduct, Mrs. Alving.

MRS. ALVING. They will do neither one thing nor the other; for now I can speak out plainly.

MANDERS. You surely won't do that. No, no, no.

MRS. ALVING. Yes. I can speak and I will. And no ideal shall suffer after all.

OSWALD. Mother! What on earth are you hiding from me?

REGINA [*listening*] O ma'am! listen! Don't you hear

shouts outside? [*She goes into the conservatory and looks out.*]

OSWALD [*at the window on the left*] What's going on? Where does that light come from?

REGINA [*cries out*] The Orphanage is on fire!

MRS. ALVING [*rushing to the window*] On fire?

MANDERS. On fire! Impossible! I have just come from there.

OSWALD. Where's my hat? Oh, never mind it — Father's Orphanage! [*He rushes out through the garden door.*]

MRS. ALVING. My shawl, Regina! It is blazing.

MANDERS. Terrible! Mrs. Alving, it is a judgment upon this abode of sin.

MRS. ALVING. Yes, of course. Come, Regina. [*She and Regina hasten out through the hall.*]

MANDERS [*folds his hands together*] And uninsured, too! [*He goes out the same way.*]

CURTAIN.

ACT THREE.

The room as before. All the doors stand open. The lamp is still burning on the table. It is dark out of doors; there is only a faint glow from the conflagration in the background to the left. Mrs. Alving, with a shawl over her head, stands in the conservatory and looks out. Regina, also with a shawl on, stands a little behind her.

MRS. ALVING. All burnt! — burnt to the ground!

REGINA. The basement is still burning.

MRS. ALVING. How is it Oswald doesn't come home? There's nothing to be saved.

REGINA. Would you like me to take down his hat to him?

MRS. ALVING. Hasn't he even got his hat on?

REGINA [*pointing to the hall*] No; there it hangs.

MRS. ALVING. Let it be. He must come up now. I will go and look for him myself. [*She goes out through the garden door.*]

MANDERS [*comes in from the hall*] Isn't Mrs. Alving here?

REGINA. She's just gone down the garden.

MANDERS. This is the most terrible night I ever lived through.

REGINA. Yes; isn't it a dreadful misfortune, sir?

MANDERS. Oh! don't talk about it! I can hardly bear to think of it.

REGINA. How *can* it have happened?

MANDERS. Don't ask me, Regina! How should *I* know? Do you, also — Isn't it enough that your father — ?

REGINA. What about him?

MANDERS. Oh, he has driven me clean out of my mind —

ENGSTRAND [*comes through the hall*] Your Reverence!

MANDERS [*turns round in terror*] Are you after me here, too?

ENGSTRAND. Yes; Lord strike me dead, but I must — It's an awfully ugly business, your Reverence.

MANDERS [*walks to and fro*] Alas! alas!

REGINA. What is the matter?

ENGSTRAND. Why, it all came of that prayer-meeting, you see. [*Softly*] The bird's limed, my girl. [*Aloud*] And to think that it's my fault that it's his Reverence's fault!

MANDERS. But I assure you, Engstrand —

ENGSTRAND. But there wasn't another soul except your Reverence that ever touched the candles down there.

MANDERS [*stops*] Ah! so you declare. But I certainly can't recollect that I ever had a candle in my hand.

ENGSTRAND. And I saw as clear as daylight how your Reverence took the light and snuffed it with your fingers, and threw away the snuff among the shavings.

MANDERS. And you stood and looked on?

ENGSTRAND. Yes. I saw it as plain as a pike-staff.

MANDERS. It's quite beyond my comprehension. Besides, it's never been my habit to snuff candles with my fingers.

ENGSTRAND. And very risky it looked, that it did! But is there so much harm done after all, your Reverence?

MANDERS [*walks restlessly to and fro*] Oh! don't ask me.

ENGSTRAND [*walks with him*] And your Reverence hadn't insured it, neither?

MANDERS [*continuing to walk up and down*] No, no, no; you've heard that already.

ENGSTRAND [*following him*] Not insured! And then to go right down and set light to the whole thing. Lord! Lord! what a misfortune!

MANDERS [*wipes the sweat from his forehead*] Aye, you may well say that, Engstrand.

ENGSTRAND. And to think that such a thing should happen to a benevolent Institution, that was to have been a blessing both to town and country, as the saying is! The newspapers won't handle your Reverence very gently, I expect.

MANDERS. No; that's just what I'm thinking of. That's almost the worst of it. All the hateful attacks and accusations! Oh! it's terrible only to imagine it.

MRS. ALVING [*comes in from the garden*] He can't be got away from the fire.

MANDERS. Ah! there you are, Mrs. Alving!

MRS. ALVING. So you've got off your Inaugural Address, Pastor Manders.

MANDERS. Oh! I should so gladly —

MRS. ALVING [*in an undertone*] It is all for the best. That Orphanage would have done no good to anybody.

MANDERS. Do you think not?

MRS. ALVING. Do you think it would?

MANDERS. It's an immense misfortune, all the same.

MRS. ALVING. Let us speak plainly of it, as a piece of business. Are you waiting for Mr. Manders, Engstrand?

ENGSTRAND [*at the hall door*] Aye, ma'am; indeed I am.

MRS. ALVING. Then sit down meanwhile.

ENGSTRAND. Thank you, ma'am; I'd rather stand.

MRS. ALVING [*to Manders*] I suppose you're going away by the steamer?

MANDERS. Yes, it starts in an hour.

MRS. ALVING. Be so good as to take all the papers with you. I won't hear another word about that affair. I have got other things to think about.

MANDERS. Mrs. Alving —

MRS. ALVING. Later on I shall send you a power of attorney to settle everything as you please.

MANDERS. That I shall very readily take upon myself. The original destination of the gift must now be completely changed, alas!

MRS. ALVING. Of course it must.

MANDERS. Well, I think, first of all, I shall arrange that the Solvik property shall pass to the parish. The land is by no means without value. It can always be turned to account for some purpose or other. And the interest of the money in the bank I could, perhaps, best apply for the

benefit of some undertaking that has proved itself a blessing to the town.

MRS. ALVING. Do exactly as you please. The whole matter is now completely indifferent to me.

ENGSTRAND. Give a thought to my Sailors' Home, your Reverence.

MANDERS. Yes, that's not a bad suggestion. That must be considered.

ENGSTRAND. Oh, devil take considering — I beg your pardon!

MANDERS [*with a sigh*] And I'm sorry to say I don't know how long I shall be able to retain control of these things — whether public opinion may not compel me to retire. It entirely depends upon the result of the official inquiry into the fire —

MRS. ALVING. What are you talking about?

MANDERS. And the result can by no means be foretold.

ENGSTRAND [*comes close to him*] Ah, but it can, though. For here stands Jacob Engstrand.

MANDERS. Well, well, but — ?

ENGSTRAND [*more softly*] And Jacob Engstrand isn't the man to desert a noble benefactor in the hour of need, as the saying is.

MANDERS. Yes, but my good fellow — how — ?

ENGSTRAND. Jacob Engstrand may be likened to a guardian angel, he may, your Reverence.

MANDERS. No, no; I can't accept that.

ENGSTRAND. Oh! you will, though, all the same. I

know a man that's taken others' sins upon himself before now, I do.

MANDERS. Jacob! [*Wrings his hand*] You are a rare character. Well, you shall be helped with your Sailors' Home. That you may rely upon. [*Engstrand tries to thank him, but cannot, for emotion. Mr. Manders hangs his traveling-bag over his shoulder*] And now let's be off. We two go together.

ENGSTRAND [*at the dining-room door, softly to Regina*] You come along too, girl. You shall live as snug as the yolk in an egg.

REGINA [*tosses her head*] *Merci!* [*She goes out into the hall and fetches Manders's overcoat.*]

MANDERS. Good-by, Mrs. Alving! and may the spirit of Law and Order descend upon this house, and that quickly.

MRS. ALVING. Good-by, Manders. [*She goes up toward the conservatory, as she sees Oswald coming in through the garden door.*]

ENGSTRAND [*while he and Regina help Manders to get his coat on*] Good-by, my child. And if any trouble should come to you, you know where Jacob Engstrand is to be found. [*Softly*] Little Harbor Street. H'm! [*To Mrs. Alving and Oswald*] And the refuge for wandering mariners shall be called "Captain Alving's Home," that it shall! And if I'm spared to carry on that house in my own way, I venture to promise that it shall be worthy of his memory.

MANDERS [*in the doorway*] H'm — h'm — now come, my dear Engstrand. Good-by! Good-by! [*He and Engstrand go out through the hall.*]

OSWALD [*walks toward the table*] What house was he talking about?

MRS. ALVING. Oh, I suppose it was a kind of Home that he and Manders want to set up.

OSWALD. It will burn down like the other.

MRS. ALVING. What makes you think so?

OSWALD. Everything will burn. There won't remain a single thing in memory of father. Here am I, too, burning down. [*Regina starts and looks at him.*]

MRS. ALVING. Oswald! you ought not to have remained so long down there, my poor boy!

OSWALD [*sits down by the table*] I almost think you are right.

MRS. ALVING. Let me dry your face, Oswald; you are quite wet. [*She dries his face with her pocket-handkerchief.*]

OSWALD [*stares indifferently in front of him*] Thanks, mother.

MRS. ALVING. Are you not tired, Oswald? Would you like to go to sleep?

OSWALD [*nervously*] No, no — I can't sleep. I never sleep. I only pretend to. [*Sadly*] That will come soon enough.

MRS. ALVING [*looking sorrowfully at him*] Yes! you really are ill, my blessed boy.

REGINA [*eagerly*] Is Mr. Alving ill?

OSWALD [*impatiently*] Oh! do shut all the doors! This awful dread —

MRS. ALVING. Shut the doors, Regina. [*Regina shuts*

them and remains standing by the hall door. Mrs. Alving takes her shawl off. Regina does the same. Mrs. Alving draws a chair across to Oswald's, and sits by him.]

MRS. ALVING. There, now! I am going to sit beside you —

OSWALD. Ah! do. And Regina shall stay here, too. Regina shall always be with me. You'll come to the rescue, Regina, won't you?

REGINA. I don't understand —

MRS. ALVING. To the rescue?

OSWALD. Yes, in the hour of need.

MRS. ALVING. Oswald, have you not your mother to come to the rescue?

OSWALD. You? [*Smiles*] No, mother; *that* rescue you will never bring me. [*Laughs sadly*] You! ha! ha! [*Looks earnestly at her*] Though, after all, it lies nearest to you. [*Impetuously*] Why don't you say* "thou" to me, Regina? Why don't you call me "Oswald"?

REGINA [*softly*] I don't think Mrs. Alving would like it.

MRS. ALVING. You shall soon have leave to do it. And sit over here beside us, won't you? [*Regina sits down quietly and hesitatingly on the other side of the table.*]

MRS. ALVING. And now, my poor suffering boy, I am going to take the burden off your mind —

OSWALD. You, mother?

MRS. ALVING. All the gnawing remorse and self-reproach.

OSWALD. And you think you can do that?

* "Sige du"—Fr. *tutoyer*.

MRS. ALVING. Yes, now I can, Oswald. You spoke of the joy of life; and at that word a new light burst for me over my life and all it has contained.

OSWALD [*shakes his head*] I don't understand what you are saying.

MRS. ALVING. You ought to have known your father when he was a young lieutenant. He was brimming over with the joy of life!

OSWALD. Yes, I know he was.

MRS. ALVING. It was like a breezy day only to look at him. And what exuberant strength and vitality there was in him!

OSWALD. Well?

MRS. ALVING. And then, child of joy as he was — for he *was* like a child at that time — he had to live here at home in a half-grown town, which had no joys to offer him, but only dissipations. He had no object in life, but only an official position. He had no work into which he could throw himself heart and soul; he had only business. He had not a single comrade that knew what the joy of life meant — only loafers and boon companions —

OSWALD. Mother!

MRS. ALVING. So that happened which was sure to happen.

OSWALD. And what was sure to happen?

MRS. ALVING. You said yourself, this evening, how it would go with you if you stayed at home.

OSWALD. Do you mean to say that father — ?

MRS. ALVING. Your poor father found no outlet for the

overpowering joy of life that was in him. And I brought no brightness into his home.

OSWALD. Not even you?

MRS. ALVING. They had taught me a lot about Duties and so on, which I had taken to be true. Everything was marked out into Duties—into my Duties and his Duties, and — I am afraid I made home intolerable for your poor father, Oswald.

OSWALD. Why did you never write me anything about all this?

MRS. ALVING. I have never before seen it in such a light that I could speak of it to you, his son.

OSWALD. In what light did you see it then?

MRS. ALVING [*slowly*] I saw only this one thing, that your father was a broken-down man before you were born.

OSWALD [*softly*] Ah! [*He rises and walks away to the window.*]

MRS. ALVING. And then, day after day, I dwelt on the thought that by rights Regina belonged here in the house — just like my own boy.

OSWALD [*turning round quickly*] Regina!

REGINA [*springs up and asks, with bated breath*] I?

MRS. ALVING. Yes, now you know it, both of you.

OSWALD. Regina!

REGINA [*to herself*] So mother was that kind of woman, after all.

MRS ALVING. Your mother had many good qualities, Regina.

REGINA. Yes, but she was one of that sort, all the same.

Oh! I've often suspected it; but — And now, if you please, ma'am, may I be allowed to go away at once?

MRS. ALVING. Do you really wish it, Regina?

REGINA. Yes, indeed I do.

MRS. ALVING. Of course you can do as you like; but —

OSWALD [*goes toward Regina*] Go away now? Now that you belong here?

REGINA. *Merci,* Mr. Alving! — or now, I suppose, I may say Oswald. But I can tell you this wasn't what I expected.

MRS. ALVING. Regina, I have not been frank with you —

REGINA. No, that you haven't, indeed. If I'd known that Oswald was ill, why — And now, too, that it can never come to anything serious between us — Oh! I really can't stop out here in the country and wear myself out nursing sick people.

OSWALD. Not even one who is so near to you?

REGINA. No, that I can't. A poor girl must make the best of her young days, or she'll be left out in the cold before she knows where she is. And I, too, have the joy of life in me, Mrs. Alving.

MRS. ALVING. I'm afraid you have. But don't throw yourself away, Regina.

REGINA. Oh! what must be, must be. If Oswald takes after his father, I take after my mother, I dare say. May I ask, ma'am, if Mr. Manders knows all this about me?

MRS. ALVING. Mr. Manders knows all about it.

REGINA [*puts on her shawl hastily*] Well, then, I'd better

make haste and get away by this steamer. Pastor Manders is so nice to deal with; and I certainly think I've as much right to a little of that money as he has — that brute of a carpenter.

MRS. ALVING. You are heartily welcome to it, Regina.

REGINA [*looks hard at her*] I think you might have brought me up as a gentleman's daughter, ma'am; it would have suited me better. [*Tosses her head*] But it's done now — it doesn't matter! [*With a bitter side glance at the corked bottle*] All the same, I may come to drink champagne with gentlefolks yet.

MRS. ALVING. And if you ever need a home, Regina, come to me.

REGINA. No, thank you, ma'am. Mr. Manders will look after me, I know. And if the worst comes to the worst, I know of one place where I belong by rights.

MRS. ALVING. Where is that?

REGINA. "Captain Alving's Home."

MRS. ALVING. Regina — now I see it — you're going to your ruin.

REGINA. Oh, stuff! Good-by. [*She nods and goes out through the hall.*]

OSWALD [*stands at the window and looks out*] Is she gone?

MRS. ALVING. Yes.

OSWALD [*murmuring aside to himself*] I think it was wrong, all this.

MRS. ALVING [*goes behind him and lays her hands on his*

shoulders] Oswald, my dear boy; has it shaken you very much?

Oswald [*turns his face toward her*] All that about father, do you mean?

Mrs. Alving. Yes, about your unhappy father. I'm so afraid it may have been too much for you.

Oswald. Why should you fancy that? Of course it came upon me as a great surprise, but, after all, it can't matter much to me.

Mrs. Alving [*draws her hands away*] Can't matter! That your father was so infinitely miserable!

Oswald. Of course I can pity him as I would anybody else; but —

Mrs. Alving. Nothing more? Your own father!

Oswald [*impatiently*] Oh, there! "Father," "father!" I never knew anything of father. I don't remember anything about him except — that he once made me sick.

Mrs. Alving. That's a terrible way to speak! Should not a son love his father, all the same?

Oswald. When a son has nothing to thank his father for? has never known him? Do you really cling to the old superstition? — you who are so enlightened in other ways?

Mrs. Alving. Is that only a superstition?

Oswald. Yes; can't you see it, mother? It is one of those notions that are current in the world, and so —

Mrs. Alving [*deeply moved*] Ghosts!

Oswald [*crossing the room*] Yes; you may well call them Ghosts.

MRS. ALVING [*wildly*] Oswald! then you don't love me, either!

OSWALD. You I know, at any rate.

MRS. ALVING. Yes, you know me; but is that all?

OSWALD. And of course I know how fond you are of me, and I can't but be grateful to you. And you can be so very useful to me, now that I am ill.

MRS. ALVING. Yes, can't I, Oswald? Oh! I could almost bless your illness which drove you home to me. For I can see very plainly you are not mine; I have to win you.

OSWALD [*impatiently*] Yes, yes, yes; all these are just so many phrases. You must recollect I am a sick man, mother. I can't be much taken up with other people; I have enough to do thinking about myself.

MRS. ALVING [*in a low voice*] I shall be easily satisfied and patient.

OSWALD. And cheerful too, mother.

MRS. ALVING. Yes, my dear boy, you are quite right. [*Goes toward him*] Have I relieved you of all remorse and self-reproach now?

OSWALD. Yes; you have done that. But who is to relieve me of the dread?

MRS. ALVING. The dread?

OSWALD [*walks across the room*] Regina could have been got to do it.

MRS. ALVING. I don't understand you. What is all this about dread — and Regina?

OSWALD. Is it very late, mother?

MRS. ALVING. It is early morning. [*She looks out*

through the conservatory] The day is dawning over the hills; and the weather is fine, Oswald. In a little while you shall see the sun.

OSWALD. I'm glad of that. Oh! there may be much for me to rejoice in and live for —

MRS. ALVING. Yes, much — much, indeed!

OSWALD. Even if I can't work —

MRS. ALVING. Oh! you will soon be able to work again, my dear boy, now that you have no longer got all those gnawing and depressing thoughts to brood over.

OSWALD. Yes, I am glad you were able to free me from all those fancies; and when I've got one thing more arranged — [*Sits on the sofa*] Now we will have a little talk, mother.

MRS. ALVING. Yes, let us. [*She pushes an arm-chair toward the sofa, and sits down close to him.*]

OSWALD. And meantime the sun will be rising. And then you will know all. And then I shan't have that dread any longer.

MRS. ALVING. What am I to know?

OSWALD [*not listening to her*] Mother, didn't you say, a little while ago, that there was nothing in the world you would not do for me, if I asked you?

MRS. ALVING. Yes, to be sure I said it.

OSWALD. And you'll stick to it, mother?

MRS. ALVING. You may rely on that, my dear and only boy! I have nothing in the world to live for but you alone.

OSWALD. All right, then; now you shall hear. Mother,

you have a strong, steadfast mind, I know. Now you are to sit quite still when you hear it.

MRS. ALVING. What dreadful thing can it be —

OSWALD. You are not to scream out. Do you hear? Do you promise me that? We'll sit and talk about it quite quietly. Do you promise me this, mother?

MRS. ALVING. Yes, yes; I promise you that. Only speak!

OSWALD. Well, you must know that all this fatigue, and my not being able to think of working at all — all that is not the illness itself —

MRS. ALVING. Then what is the illness itself?

OSWALD. The disease I have as my birthright [*he points to his forehead and adds very softly*] is seated here.

MRS. ALVING [*almost voiceless*] Oswald! No, no!

OSWALD. Don't scream. I can't bear it. Yes, it is sitting here — waiting. And it may break out any day — at any moment.

MRS. ALVING. Oh! what horror!

OSWALD. Now, do be quiet. That's how it stands with me —

MRS. ALVING [*jumps up*] It is not true, Oswald. It is impossible. It can't be so.

OSWALD. I have had one attack down there already. It was soon over. But when I got to know what had been the matter with me, then the dread came upon me raging and tearing; and so I set off home to you as fast as I could.

MRS. ALVING. Then this is the dread — ?

OSWALD. Yes, for it's so indescribably awful, you know.

Oh! if it had been merely an ordinary mortal disease! For I'm not so afraid of death — though I should like to live as long as I can.

MRS. ALVING. Yes, yes, Oswald, you must.

OSWALD. But this is so unspeakably loathsome! To become a little baby again! To have to be fed! To have to — Oh! I can't speak of it.

MRS. ALVING. The child has his mother to nurse him.

OSWALD [*jumps up*] No, never; that's just what I won't have. I can't endure to think that perhaps I should lie in that state for many years — get old and gray. And in the meantime you might die and leave me. [*Sits in Mrs. Alving's chair*] For the doctor said it would not necessarily prove fatal at once. He called it a sort of softening of the brain — or something of the kind. [*Smiles sadly*] I think that expression sounds so nice. It always sets me thinking of cherry-colored velvet — something soft and delicate to stroke.

MRS. ALVING [*screams*] Oswald!

OSWALD [*springs up and paces the room*] And now you have taken Regina from me. If I'd only had her! She would have come to the rescue, I know.

MRS. ALVING [*goes to him*] What do you mean by that, my darling boy? Is there any help in the world that I wouldn't give you?

OSWALD. When I got over my attack in Paris, the doctor told me that when it came again — and it will come again — there would be no more hope.

MRS. ALVING. He was heartless enough —

OSWALD. I demanded it of him. I told him I had preparations to make. [*He smiles cunningly*] And so I had. [*He takes a little box from his inner breast pocket and opens it*] Mother, do you see these?

MRS. ALVING. What is that?

OSWALD. Morphia powder.

MRS. ALVING [*looks horrified at him*] Oswald — my boy?

OSWALD. I have scraped together twelve pilules —

MRS. ALVING [*snatches at it*] Give me the box, Oswald.

OSWALD. Not yet, mother. [*He hides the box again in his pocket.*]

MRS. ALVING. I shall never survive this.

OSWALD. It must be survived. Now, if I had Regina here, I should have told her how it stood with me, and begged her to come to the rescue at the last. She would have done it. I'm certain she would.

MRS. ALVING. Never!

OSWALD. When the horror had come upon me, and she saw me lying there helpless, like a little new-born baby, impotent, lost, helpless, past saving —

MRS. ALVING. Never in all the world would Regina have done this.

OSWALD. Regina would have done it. Regina was so splendidly light-hearted. And she would soon have wearied of nursing an invalid like me —

MRS. ALVING. Then Heaven be praised that Regina is not here.

OSWALD. Well, then, it is you that must come to the rescue, mother.

MRS. ALVING [*screams aloud*] I!

OSWALD. Who is nearer to it than you?

MRS. ALVING. I! your mother!

OSWALD. For that very reason.

MRS. ALVING. I, who gave you life!

OSWALD. I never asked you for life. And what sort of a life is it that you have given me? I will not have it. You shall take it back again.

MRS. ALVING. Help! help! [*She runs out into the hall.*]

OSWALD [*going after her*] Don't leave me. Where are you going?

MRS. ALVING [*in the hall*] To fetch the doctor, Oswald. Let me go.

OSWALD [*also outside*] You shall not go. And no one shall come in. [*The locking of a door is heard.*]

MRS. ALVING [*comes in again*] Oswald — Oswald! — my child!

OSWALD [*follows her*] Have you a mother's heart for me, and yet can see me suffer from this unutterable dread?

MRS. ALVING [*after a moment's silence, commands herself, and says:*] Here is my hand upon it.

OSWALD. Will you — ?

MRS. ALVING. If it is ever necessary. But it will never be necessary. No, no; it is impossible.

OSWALD. Well, let us hope so, and let us live together as long as we can. Thank you, mother. [*He sits down*

in the arm-chair which Mrs. Alving has moved to the sofa. Day is breaking. The lamp is still burning on the table.]

MRS. ALVING [*drawing near cautiously*] Do you feel calm, now?

OSWALD. Yes.

MRS. ALVING [*bending over him*] It has been a dreadful fancy of yours, Oswald — nothing but a fancy. You have not been able to bear all this excitement. But now you shall have a long rest; at home with your own mother, my own blessed boy. Everything you point to you shall have, just as when you were a little child. There, now! That crisis is over now. You see how easily it passed. Oh! I was sure it would — And do you see, Oswald, what a lovely day we are going to have? Brilliant sunshine! Now you will really be able to see your home. [*She goes to the table and puts the lamp out. Sunrise. The glacier and the snow-peaks in the background glow in the morning light.*]

OSWALD [*sits in the arm-chair with his back toward the landscape, without moving. Suddenly he says:*] Mother, give me the sun.

MRS. ALVING [*by the table, starts and looks at him*] What do you say?

OSWALD [*repeats, in a dull, toneless voice*] The sun. The sun.

MRS. ALVING [*goes to him*] Oswald, what is the matter with you? [*Oswald seems to shrink together in the chair; all his muscles relax; his face is expressionless, his eyes have a glassy stare. Mrs. Alving is quivering with terror*]

What is this? [*Shrieks*] Oswald, what is the matter with you? [*Falls on her knees beside him and shakes him*] Oswald, Oswald! look at me! Don't you know me?

OSWALD [*tonelessly as before*] The sun. The sun.

MRS. ALVING [*springs up in despair, intwines her hands in her hair, and shrieks*] I can't bear it. [*Whispers as though petrified*] I can't bear it! Never! [*Suddenly*] Where has he got them? [*Fumbles hastily in his breast*] Here! [*Shrinks back a few steps and screams*] No, no, no! Yes! — No, no! [*She stands a few steps from him with her hands twisted in her hair, and stares at him in speechless terror.*]

OSWALD [*sits motionless as before and says*] The sun. The sun.

CURTAIN.

THE LADY FROM THE SEA

BY

HENRIK IBSEN

English Translation by

MRS. FRANCES E. ARCHER

INTRODUCTION

In "The Lady from the Sea," with which Signora Duse follows "Ghosts" in the repertory of her farewell American tour under the direction of Morris Gest, Ibsen departed radically from the bitter frontal attack on modern institutions and customs. Without turning backward to the dramatic poetry of "Brand" and "Peer Gynt," he wrote a poetic drama whose subtlety of meaning has been greatly exaggerated but whose subtlety of feeling is a rich challenge to Duse's powers of spiritual interpretation.

Less played in comparison with the discussion surrounding it than any of the later and greater plays of Ibsen, "The Lady from the Sea" has had an introduction to the stages of all the leading countries of Western Europe and to America—but only an introduction. London saw a version of it at the Terry Theatre in 1891, three years after the manuscript was completed; and again at the Royalty Theatre eleven years later at the hands of Laurence Irving. Paris was indebted to Lugné-Poë for first sight of it in 1892. For the only important English production in America, New York was indebted to the Chicago Drama Players in November, 1911, and Chicago to this same company, in February of the next year.

This cursory acquaintance with "The Lady from the Sea" may be attributed to the play's poetic, even idyllic, character. In the quarter century after Ibsen was discovered to the world, those of his plays were most frequently performed which revealed him in the mood of indignation and revolt. Ibsen, the poet, was neglected by those who, largely for their own interested ends, proclaimed Ibsen the sociologist. But, the poet, like murder, will out. And one of Duse's most distinct services is to recall this too-long-forgotten aspect of the great Norwegian.

The Editor

CAST OF CHARACTERS.

DOCTOR WANGEL,[1] *district physician.*
ELLIDA[2] WANGEL, *his second wife.*
BOLETTA } *his daughters by his*
HILDA, *a young girl* } *former marriage.*
ARNHOLM, *a schoolmaster.*
LYNGSTRAND.
BALLESTED.[3]
A STRANGER.
Young Townspeople.
Tourists, etc.

[1] Pronounce *Vangl.*
[2] Pronounce *El-lee-da,* with accent on the second syllable.
[3] Pronounce *Bal-le-staid.*

The action takes place in the summer-time, in a small town beside a fiord in Northern Norway.

ACT ONE.

Doctor Wangel's house, with a large veranda, on the left. Garden in front and around. Near the veranda, a flag-staff. To the right, in the garden, an arbor, with table and chairs. At the back, a hedge, with a small gate. Beyond the hedge, a road along the shore, shaded by trees on either side. Between the trees there is a view of the fiord, with high mountain ranges and peaks in the distance. It is a warm and brilliantly clear summer morning.

Ballested, a middle-aged man, dressed in an old velvet jacket and broad-brimmed artist's hat, stands at the foot of the flag-staff, arranging the cord. The flag is lying on the ground. A little way off stands an easel with a stretched canvas. Beside it, on a camp-stool, are brushes, palette, and a paint-box.

Boletta Wangel comes out upon the veranda through the open garden-room door. She is carrying a large vase of flowers, which she places upon the table.

BOLETTA. Well, Ballested, — can you get it to run?

BALLESTED. Oh yes, Miss Boletta. It's easy enough. — May I ask if you are expecting visitors to-day?

BOLETTA. Yes, we expect Mr. Arnholm this morning. He came to town last night.

BALLESTED. Arnholm? Wait a moment — wasn't Arnholm the name of the tutor you had here some years ago?

BOLETTA. Yes; it is he that is coming.

BALLESTED. Ah, indeed. So he is in these parts again?

BOLETTA. That is why we want the flag run up.

BALLESTED. Ah, I see, I see. [*Boletta goes into the garden-room again.*]

[*Shortly afterwards, Lyngstrand comes along the road from the right, and stops, interested by the sight of the*

easel and painter's materials. He is a slightly-built young man, of delicate appearance, poorly but neatly dressed.]

LYNGSTRAND [*outside, by the hedge*] Good morning.

BALLESTED [*turning round*] Ah — good morning. [*Hoists the flag*] So-ho! — up goes the balloon! [*Makes the cord fast, and begins to busy himself at the easel*] I take off my hat to you, sir — though I don't think I have the pleasure ——

LYNGSTRAND. You are a painter, are you not?

BALLESTED. Yes, certainly. Why should I not be a painter?

LYNGSTRAND. Ah, I can see you are. — Should you mind my coming in for a moment?

BALLESTED. Do you want to have a look at it?

LYNGSTRAND. Yes, I should like to extremely.

BALLESTED. Oh, there's nothing much to see as yet. But pray come in — you're quite welcome.

LYNGSTRAND. Many thanks. [*He comes in through the garden gate.*]

BALLESTED [*painting*] It's the inner part of the fiord, among the islands, that I am working at.

LYNGSTRAND. Yes, I see.

BALLESTED. But I haven't put in the figure yet. There is no such thing as a model to be had in the town.

LYNGSTRAND. There is to be a figure, is there?

BALLESTED. Yes. By the rock in the foreground here, I mean to have a half-dead mermaid lying.

LYNGSTRAND. Why half-dead?

BALLESTED. She has strayed in from the sea, and can't find her way out again. So she lies here dying by inches in the brackish waters, you understand.

LYNGSTRAND. Oh, that is the idea?

BALLESTED. It was the lady of this house that suggested it to me.

LYNGSTRAND. What will you call the picture when it is finished?

BALLESTED. I think of calling it "The Mermaid's End."

LYNGSTRAND. Capital. — You are sure to make something good out of this.

BALLESTED [*looking at him*] An artist yourself, perhaps?

LYNGSTRAND. A painter, you mean?

BALLESTED. Yes.

LYNGSTRAND. No, I am not. But I am going to be a sculptor. My name is Hans Lyngstrand.

BALLESTED. Going to be a sculptor, are you? Well, well, sculpture, too, is a fine, gentleman-like art. — I fancy I've seen you in the street once or twice. Have you been staying here long?

LYNGSTRAND. No, I have been here only a fortnight. But I hope I may be able to stay the whole summer.

BALLESTED. To enjoy the gayeties of the season, eh?

LYNGSTRAND. Well, rather to get up my strength a bit.

BALLESTED. Not an invalid, I hope?

LYNGSTRAND. Well, I'm what you might call a little bit of an invalid. Nothing to speak of, you know. It's only a sort of short-windedness in my chest.

BALLESTED. Pooh — a mere trifle. Still, I would consult a good doctor, if I were you.

LYNGSTRAND. I thought, if I could find an opportunity, I might speak to Dr. Wangel.

BALLESTED. Yes, do. [*Looks out to the left*] Here comes another steamer. Chock full of passengers. It's extraordinary how the tourist business has increased here during the last few years.

LYNGSTRAND. Yes, there seems to be a continual coming and going.

BALLESTED. The place is full of summer visitors, too. I'm sometimes afraid that our good town may lose its character with all this foreign invasion.

LYNGSTRAND. Are you a native of the place?

BALLESTED. No, I am not. But I have accla — acclimatized myself. I have become attached to the place by the bonds of time and habit.

LYNGSTRAND. You have lived here a long time, then?

BALLESTED. Well, seventeen or eighteen years. I came here with Skive's[1] dramatic company. But we got into

[1] Pronounce *Sheevë's.*

financial difficulties; so the company broke up and was scattered to the winds.

LYNGSTRAND. But you remained?

BALLESTED. I remained. And I have had no cause to regret it. You see in those days I was mainly employed as a scene-painter.

[*Boletta comes out with a rocking-chair, which she places in the veranda.*]

BOLETTA [*speaking into the garden-room*] Hilda, — see if you can find the embroidered footstool for father.

LYNGSTRAND [*approaches the veranda and bows*] Good morning, Miss Wangel.

BOLETTA [*by the balustrade*] Ah, is that you, Mr. Lyngstrand? Good morning. Excuse me one moment. [*Goes into the house.*]

BALLESTED. Do you know the family here?

LYNGSTRAND. Very slightly. I have met the young ladies once or twice at other houses. And I had a little talk with Mrs. Wangel the last time the band played up at the Prospect. She said I might come and see them.

BALLESTED. I'll tell you what, — you ought to cultivate their acquaintance.

LYNGSTRAND. Yes, I've been thinking of paying them a visit — I mean calling on them, you know. If I could only find some pretext —

BALLESTED. Oh, nonsense, — a pretext — [*Looks out to the left*] Confound it all! [*Collects his things*] The steamer's alongside the pier already. I must be off to the hotel. Perhaps some of the new arrivals may require my services. For I practice as a hair-cutter and *friseur,* too, I must tell you.

LYNGSTRAND. You seem to be very versatile.

BALLESTED. One must know how to ac — climatize oneself to various professions in these small places. If you should ever require anything in the hair line — pomade or what not — you have only to ask for Dancing-Master Ballested.

LYNGSTRAND. Dancing-Master —

BALLESTED. President of the Musical Society, if you

prefer it. We give a concert up at the Prospect this evening. Good-by, good-by.

[*He goes with his painting materials through the garden gate, and then out to the left.*]

[*Hilda comes out with the stool. Boletta brings more flowers. Lyngstrand bows to Hilda from the garden.*]

HILDA [*by the balustrade, without returning the bow*] Boletta said you had ventured in to-day.

LYNGSTRAND. Yes, I took the liberty of coming into the garden.

HILDA. Have you been out for your morning walk?

LYNGSTRAND. Well, no, — I haven't had much of a walk to-day.

HILDA. Have you been bathing then?

LYNGSTRAND. Yes, I had a little dip. I saw your mother down there. She was just going into her bathing-house.

HILDA. Who was?

LYNGSTRAND. Your mother.

HILDA. Oh, indeed. [*She places the stool in front of the rocking-chair.*]

BOLETTA [*as if to change the subject*] Did you see anything of my father's boat out on the fiord?

LYNGSTRAND. Yes, I saw a sailing-boat that seemed to be standing inwards.

BOLETTA. That must have been father. He has been out visiting patients on the islands. [*She arranges things about the table.*]

LYNGSTRAND [*standing on the lowest of the veranda steps*] Why, what a splendid show of flowers you have here — !

BOLETTA. Yes, doesn't it look nice?

LYNGSTRAND. Oh, charming. It looks as if the day were some family festival.

HILDA. So it is.

LYNGSTRAND. I guessed as much. Your father's birthday, I suppose?

BOLETTA [*warningly to Hilda*] H'm, — h'm!

HILDA [*not heeding her*] No, mother's.

LYNGSTRAND. Oh, indeed, — your mother's, is it?

BOLETTA [*in a low, angry tone*] Now, Hilda — !

HILDA [*in the same tone*] Let me alone! [*To Lyngstrand*] I suppose you're going home to lunch now?

LYNGSTRAND [*descending from the step*] Yes, I suppose I must see about getting something to eat.

HILDA. I dare say you live on the fat of the land at the hotel.

LYNGSTRAND. I am not staying at the hotel now. It was too expensive for me.

HILDA. Where are you now, then?

LYNGSTRAND. I have a room at Madam Jensen's.[1]

HILDA. Which Madam Jensen's?

LYNGSTRAND. The midwife's.

HILDA. Excuse me, Mr. Lyngstrand, but I really have no time to —

LYNGSTRAND. Oh, I suppose I oughtn't to have said that.

HILDA. Said what?

LYNGSTRAND. What I said just now.

HILDA [*looks at him witheringly from top to toe*] I don't in the least understand you.

LYNGSTRAND. No, no. Well, I must bid you good-by for the present, ladies.

BOLETTA [*comes forward to the steps*] Good-by, good-by, Mr. Lyngstrand. You must please excuse us for to-day. — But another time, when you have nothing better to do — and when you feel inclined, — I hope you'll look in and see father and — and the rest of us.

LYNGSTRAND. Many thanks. I shall be only too delighted.

[*He bows and goes out by the garden gate. As he passes along the road outside, to the left, he bows again towards the veranda.*]

HILDA [*under her breath*] Adieu, Mossyoo! My love to Mother Jensen.

LYNGSTRAND [*softly, shakes her by the arm*] Hilda — ! You naughty child! Are you mad? He might easily hear you!

[1] Pronounce *Yensen.*

HILDA. Pooh, — do you think I care?

BOLETTA [*looks out to the right*] Here comes father.

[*Doctor Wangel, in traveling dress, and carrying a hand-bag, comes along the foot-path from the right.*]

WANGEL. Well, here I am again, little girls! [*He comes in through the gate.*]

BOLETTA [*goes down to meet him in the garden*] Oh, I'm so glad you have come.

HILDA [*also going down to him*] Have you finished for the day now, father?

WANGEL. Oh no. I must go down to the surgery for a little while by-and-by. — Tell me, — do you know whether Arnholm has arrived?

BOLETTA. Yes, he came last night. We sent to the hotel to inquire.

WANGEL. Then you haven't seen him yet?

BOLETTA. No. But he's sure to look in this forenoon.

WANGEL. Yes, of course he will.

HILDA [*drawing him round*] Father, you must look about you now.

WANGEL [*looking towards the veranda*] Yes, yes, my child, I see. — There is quite an air of festivity about the place.

BOLETTA. Don't you think we have arranged it prettily?

WANGEL. Yes, you have indeed — Is — are we alone in the house?

HILDA. Yes, she has gone to —

BOLETTA [*interrupts quickly*] Mother is bathing.

WANGEL [*looks kindly at Boletta and pats her head. Then he says, with some hesitation:*] Look here, little girls — do you intend to keep up this display all day? And the flag flying too?

HILDA. Why, of course we do, father!

WANGEL. H'm — yes. But you see —

BOLETTA [*nodding and smiling to him*] Of course you understand that it's all in honor of Mr. Arnholm. When such an old friend comes to pay his first visit to you —

HILDA [*smiling and shaking him*] Remember — wasn't he Boletta's tutor, father?

WANGEL [*half smiling*] You are a pair of young rogues. — Well, well, — after all, it's only natural that we should remember her who is no longer among us. But all the same — Look here, Hilda. [*Gives her his hand-bag*] This must go down to the surgery. — No, little girls, — I don't like all this — the manner of it, I mean. That we should make a practice every year of — Well, what can one say? I suppose there is no other way of doing it.

HILDA [*is about to go through the garden to the left with the hand-bag, but stops, turns, and points*] Look at that gentleman coming along the road. I believe it's Mr. Arnholm.

BOLETTA [*looks in the same direction*] He! [*Laughs*] What an absurd idea! To take that middle-aged man for Mr. Arnholm.

WANGEL. Wait a bit, child. Upon my life, I believe it's he! — Yes, I am sure of it!

BOLETTA [*gazing fixedly, in quiet astonishment*] Yes, I do believe it is!

[*Arnholm, in elegant morning dress, with gold spectacles and a light cane, appears on the road, coming from the left. He looks somewhat overworked. On seeing the party in the garden, he bows in a friendly way, and comes through the gate.*]

WANGEL [*going to meet him*] Welcome, my dear Arnholm! Heartily welcome to your old haunts again.

ARNHOLM. Thank you, thank you, Doctor Wangel. A thousand thanks. [*They shake hands and cross the garden together*] And here are the children! [*Holds out his hands to them and looks at them*] These two I should scarcely have known again.

WANGEL. No, I dare say not.

ARNHOLM. Oh, well, — perhaps Boletta. — Yes, I should have known Boletta.

WANGEL. Scarcely, I think. Let me see, it's eight or nine years since you saw her last. Ah yes, there has been many a change here since then.

ARNHOLM [*looking about him*] I should hardly say so.

Except that the trees have grown a bit — and you have planted a new arbor there —

WANGEL. Oh, no, outwardly I dare say.

ARNHOLM [*smiles*] And now, of course, you have two grown-up daughters in the house.

WANGEL. Oh, only one grown-up, surely.

HILDA [*half-aloud*] Just listen to father!

WANGEL. And now suppose we sit in the veranda. It's cooler there than here. Come along.

ARNHOLM. Thanks, thanks, my dear Doctor. [*They go up the steps. Wangel gives Arnholm the rocking-chair.*]

WANGEL. That's right. Now you shall just sit quiet and have a good rest. You are looking rather tired after your journey.

ARNHOLM. Oh, that's nothing. Now that I am here again —

BOLETTA [*to Wangel*] Shall we bring a little soda-water and syrup into the garden-room? It will soon be too warm out here.

WANGEL. Yes do, little girls. Soda-water and syrup. And perhaps a little cognac.

BOLETTA. Cognac too?

WANGEL. Just a little. In case any one should care for it.

BOLETTA. Very well. Hilda, will you take the hand-bag down to the surgery? [*Boletta goes into the garden-room and closes the door after her. Hilda takes the bag and, going through the garden, disappears behind the house to the left.*]

ARNHOLM [*who has been following Boletta with his eyes*] What a splendid girl — what splendid girls they have grown into!

WANGEL [*seats himself*] Yes, don't you think so?

ARNHOLM. Boletta quite astonishes me — and Hilda too, for that matter. — But you yourself, my dear Doctor — do you intend to remain here for the rest of your days?

WANGEL. Oh yes, that's what it will come to, I suppose. I was born and bred here, you see. Here I lived very very happily with her who was so early taken from us — with

her whom you knew when you were here before, Arnholm.

ARNHOLM. Yes — yes.

WANGEL. And now I live here so happily with one who has come to me in her stead. I must say that, take it all in all, the fates have been kind to me.

ARNHOLM. You have no children by your second marriage?

WANGEL. We had a little boy, two or two and a half years ago. But we did not keep him long. He died when he was four or five months old.

ARNHOLM. Is your wife not at home to-day?

WANGEL. Oh yes, she'll be here very soon. She has gone to bathe. She never misses a day at this season; no matter what the weather may be.

ARNHOLM. Is she out of health?

WANGEL. No, not exactly; but she has been curiously nervous the last couple of years or so — off and on, you know. I can't quite make out what is wrong with her. But to get into the sea is life and happiness to her.

ARNHOLM. I remember that of old.

WANGEL [*with an almost imperceptible smile*] Yes, to be sure, you knew Ellida when you were tutor out at Skioldvik.[1]

ARNHOLM. Of course. She often visited at the parsonage. And I used generally to see her when I went to the lighthouse to have a talk with her father.

WANGEL. Her life out there has left a deep impression upon her, as you may imagine. In town here people can't understand it at all. They call her "the lady from the sea."

ARNHOLM. Do they?

WANGEL. Yes. And look here — speak to her about the old days, my dear Arnholm. I am sure it will do her good.

ARNHOLM [*looking doubtfully at him*] Have you any particular reason to think so?

WANGEL. Yes, certainly I have.

ELLIDA'S VOICE [*heard without, in the garden to the right*] Are you there, Wangel?

WANGEL [*rising*] Yes, dear.

[*Mrs. Wangel, with a large light cloak around her, and*

[1] Pronounce *Sholdveek*.

with wet hair hanging loose over her shoulders, comes from among the trees beside the arbor. Arnholm rises.]

WANGEL [*smiling and stretching out his hands towards her*] Ah, here comes the mermaid!

ELLIDA [*hastens up to the veranda and seizes his hands*] Thank heaven, you're safe home again! When did you come?

WANGEL. Just now — a few moments ago. [*Points to Arnholm*] But you have nothing to say to an old acquaintance — ?

ELLIDA [*holds out her hand to Arnholm*] So you have really come then? Welcome! And forgive my not being at home —

ARNHOLM. Oh, don't mention it. Pray don't stand on ceremony —

WANGEL. Was the water nice and cool to-day?

ELLIDA. Cool! Why, the water never is cool here — so tepid and flat. Pah! the water is sickly here in the fiords.

ARNHOLM. Sickly?

ELLIDA. Yes, sickly. And I believe it makes one sickly too.

WANGEL [*smiling*] A nice testimonial for a sea-bathing place.

ARNHOLM. I should rather say that you, Mrs. Wangel, stand in a peculiar relation to the sea and all that belongs to it.

ELLIDA. Well, you may be right. I almost think so myself. But do you see how the girls have been decorating the place in your honor?

WANGEL [*embarrassed*] H'm. [*Looks at his watch*] I'm afraid I must be going —

ARNHOLM. It is really in my honor?

ELLIDA. Why, of course it is. We're not so fine as this every day. — Pah! How suffocatingly hot it is under this roof! [*Goes down into the garden*] Come over here! Here there's a breath of air to be had at any rate. [*She seats herself in the arbor.*]

ARNHOLM [*goes to her*] Now I should say the air was distinctly fresh here.

ELLIDA. Yes, you are used to the close air of Christiania. I'm told it is perfectly dreadful there in summer.

WANGEL [*who has also come down into the garden*] Ellida dear, I must leave you to entertain our good friend here for a while.

ELLIDA. Have you work to do?

WANGEL. Yes, I must go down to the surgery: and then I must change my clothes. But I shan't be long —

ARNHOLM [*seats himself in the arbor*] Don't hurry, my dear Doctor. Your wife and I will manage to pass the time.

WANGEL. Ah yes — I'm sure of that. Well, good-by for the present then? [*He goes out through the garden to the left.*]

ELLIDA [*after a short silence*] Don't you think it is nice sitting here?

ARNHOLM. I think it is very nice.

ELLIDA. This is called my summer-house; for it was I that had it built. Or rather Wangel — to please me.

ARNHOLM. And you sit here a good deal?

ELLIDA. Yes, I pass most of the day here.

ARNHOLM. With the girls, I suppose.

ELLIDA. No, the girls — they keep to the veranda.

ARNHOLM. And Wangel?

ELLIDA. Oh, Wangel goes to and fro. Sometimes he is here with me, and sometimes over there with the children.

ARNHOLM. Is it you that have arranged things so?

ELLIDA. I think it's the arrangement that suits us all best. We can speak across to each other now and again — whenever we happen to have anything to say.

ARNHOLM [*after a reflective pause*] When last I crossed your path — out at Skioldvik, I mean — H'm — that's a long time ago —

ELLIDA. It is a good ten years since you were out there with us.

ARNHOLM. Yes, about that. But when I remember you out at the lighthouse — ! "The heathen," as the old pastor used to call you, because he said your father had had

you christened with the name of a ship and not of a Christian —

ELLIDA. Well, what then?

ARNHOLM. The last thing I should have expected was to meet you again, here, as Mrs. Wangel.

ELLIDA. No, at that time Wangel was not yet a — The girls' first mother was living then — their own mother, I mean —

ARNHOLM. Of course, of course. But even if it had not been so — even if he had had no ties — I should never have expected this to come to pass.

ELLIDA. Nor I. Never in this world — at that time.

ARNHOLM. Wangel is such a fine fellow; so upright, so genuinely good-hearted, and kind to every one —

ELLIDA [*warmly and cordially*] Yes, indeed he is!

ARNHOLM. — but he must be so utterly different from you, I should think.

ELLIDA. You are right there too; we are different.

ARNHOLM. Well then, how did it come about? How was it?

ELLIDA. You mustn't ask me, my dear Arnholm. I shouldn't be able to explain it to you. And even if I did, you could never really understand a word of my explanation.

ARNHOLM. H'm — [*A little more softly*] Have you ever told your husband anything about me? I mean, of course, about the unsuccessful step which — I was once rash enough to take.

ELLIDA. No. How can you think I would? I have never said a word to him — about what you allude to.

ARNHOLM. I am glad of that. I felt a little embarrassed at the thought that —

ELLIDA. You need not at all. I have only told him what is true — that I liked you very much, and that you were the truest and best friend I had out there.

ARNHOLM. Thank you for that. But now tell me — why have you never written to me since I left?

ELLIDA. I thought it might perhaps be painful to you to

hear from one who — who could not meet your wishes. It would have been like opening an old wound, I thought.

ARNHOLM. H'm — Well, well, I dare say you were right.

ELLIDA. But why did you never write?

ARNHOLM [*looks at her and smiles half reproachfully*] I? I begin? And perhaps be suspected of wishing to reopen the attack? After meeting with such a rebuff?

ELLIDA. Oh no, I can understand that too.— Have you never thought of forming some other tie?

ARNHOLM. Never. I have remained faithful to my memories.

ELLIDA [*half-joking*] Oh, nonsense! Let those sad old memories go. I am sure you had much better think about getting happily married.

ARNHOLM. Then I have no time to lose, Mrs. Wangel. Remember — I blush to say it — I shall never see seven-and-thirty again.

ELLIDA. Well then, all the more reason to make haste. [*Is silent for a moment, then says earnestly and in a low tone*] But listen now, my dear Arnholm, — I am going to tell you something I could not have told you at that time, to save my life.

ARNHOLM. What may that be?

ELLIDA. When you took — that unsuccessful step, as you said just now, — I could not answer you otherwise than I did.

ARNHOLM. I know that. You had nothing but friendship to offer me. I quite understand that.

ELLIDA. But you do not know that my whole mind and all my thoughts were centered elsewhere at that time?

ARNHOLM. At that time?

ELLIDA. Yes, just then.

ARNHOLM. But that is impossible! You are mistaking the time! I don't believe you knew Wangel then.

ELLIDA. It is not Wangel that I am speaking of.

ARNHOLM. Not Wangel? But at that time — out at Skioldvik — I don't remember another creature that I could conceive your caring for.

ELLIDA. No, no, — I dare say not. For the whole thing was such utter madness.

ARNHOLM. Do tell me more about this!

ELLIDA. Oh, it is enough for you to know that I was not free at that time. And now you do know it.

ARNHOLM. And if you had been free at that time?

ELLIDA. What then?

ARNHOLM. Would your answer to my letter have been different?

ELLIDA. How can I tell? When Wangel came, my answer was different.

ARNHOLM. Then what is the use of telling me that you were not free?

ELLIDA [*rises, as if in distress and agitation*] Because I must have some one I can speak to about it. No, no, don't rise.

ARNHOLM. Your husband, then, knows nothing of the matter?

ELLIDA. I told him from the first that my thoughts had once been drawn elsewhere. He has never wanted to know more. We have never touched upon the subject since. After all, it was nothing but a piece of madness; and then it all came to an end so quickly. At least, — in a way.

ARNHOLM [*rising*] Only in a way? Not entirely?

ELLIDA. Oh yes, of course! My dear good Arnholm, it is not at all as you suppose. It's something quite incomprehensible. I don't think I could find words to tell you of it. You would only think I was ill — or else that I was stark mad.

ARNHOLM. My dear Mrs. Wangel — now you must and shall tell me the whole story.

ELLIDA. Well then — I suppose I must try. How should you, with your common sense, ever be able to understand that — [*Looks out and breaks off*] Wait — another time — here is some one coming.

[*Lyngstrand appears on the road, from the left, and enters the garden. He has a flower in his button-hole, and carries a large handsome bouquet, wrapped round with*

paper and tied with ribbons. He stops, hesitating a little, in front of the veranda.]

ELLIDA [*coming forward in the arbor*] Is it the girls you are looking for, Mr. Lyngstrand?

LYNGSTRAND [*turning*] Ah, are you there, Mrs. Wangel? [*Bows and approaches*] No, not exactly — it wasn't the young ladies. It was you yourself, Mrs. Wangel. You gave me permission to come and see you —

ELLIDA. Yes, of course I did. You are always welcome here.

LYNGSTRAND. Many thanks. I fortunately happened to hear that this was a day of rejoicing in the family —

ELLIDA. Ah, so you know that?

LYNGSTRAND. Yes; and so I make so bold as to offer you this, Mrs. Wangel — [*He bows and holds out the bouquet.*]

ELLIDA [*smiles*] But, my dear Mr. Lyngstrand, ought you not to give your beautiful flowers to Mr. Arnholm himself? For it's in his honor that —

LYNGSTRAND [*looks in bewilderment from one to the other*] I beg your pardon — I don't know this gentleman. It's only — I meant them for a birthday gift, Mrs. Wangel.

ELLIDA. A birthday gift? Then you have made a mistake, Mr. Lyngstrand. To-day is not the birthday of any one in this house.

LYNGSTRAND [*smiling quietly*] Oh, I know all about it. But I didn't know it was such a secret.

ELLIDA. What is it you know?

LYNGSTRAND. That it's your birthday, Mrs. Wangel —

ELLIDA. Mine?

ARNHOLM [*looking at her inquiringly*] To-day? No, surely not.

ELLIDA [*to Lyngstrand*] What has put that into your head?

LYNGSTRAND. It was Miss Hilda that let it out. I happened to look in a little while ago, and I asked the young ladies why they had made such a grand display of flowers and flags —

ELLIDA. Well?

LYNGSTRAND. — and Miss Hilda answered: "Oh, because it's mother's birthday."

ELLIDA. Mother's — ! Oh indeed.

ARNHOLM. Aha! [*He and Ellida exchange glances of comprehension.*]

ARNHOLM. Well, since the young man has found it out, Mrs. Wangel —

ELLIDA [*to Lyngstrand*] Yes, since you have found it out —

LYNGSTRAND [*offers the bouquet again*] May I be permitted to offer my congratulations — ?

ELLIDA [*taking the flowers*] Many thanks. — Won't you sit down a moment, Mr. Lyngstrand? [*Ellida, Arnholm, and Lyngstrand seat themselves in the arbor.*]

ELLIDA. All this about — about my birthday — was to have been a secret, Mr. Arnholm.

ARNHOLM. So I see. It was not to have been mentioned to us outsiders.

ELLIDA [*lays the bouquet on the table*] No, just so. Not to outsiders.

LYNGSTRAND. I promise faithfully I won't mention it to a living creature.

ELLIDA. Oh, I didn't mean it in that way. — But how are you now? I think you are looking better than you did.

LYNGSTRAND. Yes, I think I am getting on quite well. And next year, if I can get to the south —

ELLIDA. The girls tell me you hope to manage it.

LYNGSTRAND. Yes; you see I have a patron in Bergen who provides for me; and he has promised to let me go next year.

ELLIDA. How did you come across him?

LYNGSTRAND. Oh, it was a great stroke of luck. I once went a voyage in one of his ships.

ELLIDA. Did you? Then at that time you wanted to be a sailor?

LYNGSTRAND. No, not in the least. But after my mother died, my father wouldn't have me hanging about at home; so he sent me to sea. On the voyage home, we

were wrecked in the English Channel; and that was a grand thing for me.

ARNHOLM. How do you mean?

LYNGSTRAND. It was in the wreck that I got my lesion — this weakness in my chest, you know. I was in the ice-cold water so long before they came and rescued me. So then I had to give up the sea — Oh yes, it was a great stroke of luck.

ARNHOLM. Indeed? You think so?

LYNGSTRAND. Yes; for the lesion is nothing to speak of; and now I am to have my heart's desire, and to be a sculptor. Only think — to be able to model in the delicate clay that yields so exquisitely under your fingers!

ELLIDA. And what are you going to model? Mermen and mermaids? Or is it to be old vikings — ?

LYNGSTRAND. No, nothing of that kind. As soon as I can manage it, I mean to have a try at a big piece of work — a group, as they call it.

ELLIDA. I see. And what is the group to represent?

LYNGSTRAND. Oh, I thought of something out of my own experience.

ARNHOLM. Yes, yes, — by all means stick to that.

ELLIDA. But what is it to be?

LYNGSTRAND. Well, I had thought of a young woman, a sailor's wife, lying and sleeping in a strange unrest, and dreaming as she sleeps. I think I can make it so that any one can see she is dreaming.

ARNHOLM. And is that all?

LYNGSTRAND. No. There is to be one other figure — a kind of shape you might call it. It is the husband she has been unfaithful to while he was away. And now he is drowned.

ARNHOLM. Why, what do you mean — ?

ELLIDA. Drowned, you say?

LYNGSTRAND. Yes, he is drowned at sea. But the strange thing is that he has come home nevertheless. It's in the night-time; and there he stands by her bedside and looks at her. He must be dripping wet, just as when they haul you up out of the sea.

ELLIDA [*leaning back in her chair*] What a strange idea! [*Closes her eyes*] Oh, I can see it livingly before my eyes.

ARNHOLM. But in the name of all that's wonderful, Mr. — ! Mr. — ! You said it was to be something out of your own experience?

LYNGSTRAND. Yes, — this is out of my own experience; in a sense, that's to say.

ARNHOLM. You have seen a dead man come —?

LYNGSTRAND. Well, I don't mean to say I have actually seen it; not outwardly, of course. But all the same —

ELLIDA [*with animation and eagerness*] Tell me all you know about this! I want to understand it thoroughly.

ARNHOLM [*smiling*] Yes, of course this is quite in your line — anything with the glamour of the sea about it.

ELLIDA. How was it then, Mr. Lyngstrand?

LYNGSTRAND. Well, you see, when we were starting for home in the brig, from a town they call Halifax, we had to leave our boatswain behind us in the hospital; so we shipped an American in his place. This new boatswain —

ELLIDA. The American?

LYNGSTRAND. Yes; — one day he borrowed from the captain a bundle of old newspapers, and was perpetually poring over them. He wanted to learn Norwegian, he said.

ELLIDA. Well; and then?

LYNGSTRAND. Well, one evening it was blowing great guns. All hands were one deck — all except the boatswain and me. For he had sprained his ankle and couldn't walk; and I wasn't very well, and was lying in my bunk. Well, there he sat in the fo'c'sle, reading away as usual at one of the old papers —

ELLIDA. Well? well?

LYNGSTRAND. When all of a sudden, I heard him give a kind of a roar; and when I looked at him I saw that his face was as white as chalk. Then he set to work to crumple and crush the paper up, and tear it into a thousand little pieces; but that he did quietly, quietly.

ELLIDA. Did he say nothing at all? Did he not speak?

LYNGSTRAND. Not at first. But presently he said, as

if to himself: "Married — to another man — while I was away."

ELLIDA [*shuts her eyes, and says half to herself*] Did he say that?

LYNGSTRAND. Yes; and would you believe it — he said it in perfectly good Norwegian. He must have had a great gift for languages, that man.

ELLIDA. And what then? What happened next?

LYNGSTRAND. Now comes the wonderful part of it — a thing I shall never forget to my dying day. For he added, — and this quite quietly too: "But mine she is, and mine she shall remain. And follow me she shall, though I should have to go home and fetch her, as a drowned man from the bottom of the sea."

ELLIDA [*pouring out a glass of water; her hand shakes*] Pah — how close it is to-day —!

LYNGSTRAND. And he said it with such force of will that I felt he was the man to do it too.

ELLIDA. Do you know at all — what has become of this man?

LYNGSTRAND. Oh, he's dead, Mrs. Wangel, beyond a doubt.

ELLIDA [*hastily*] What makes you think that?

LYNGSTRAND. We were shipwrecked afterwards in the Channel, you know. I got off in the long-boat with the captain and five others; but the mate went in the dingey, and with him was the American and one man besides.

ELLIDA. And nothing has been heard of them since?

LYNGSTRAND. Not a word, Mrs. Wangel. My patron wrote me so, only the other day. And that is the very reason I am so anxious to make a group of it. I can see the sailor's faithless wife so life-like before me; and then the avenger, who is drowned, but nevertheless comes home from sea. I have them both before my eyes as distinctly as possible.

ELLIDA. So have I. [*Rising*] Come, — let us go in. Or rather down to Wangel! It seems to me so stifling here. [*She comes out of the arbor.*]

LYNGSTRAND [*who has also risen*] I think I must be

going now. I only just looked in to wish you many happy returns of the day.

ELLIDA. Well, if you must go — [*Holds out her hand*] Good-by, and thanks for the flowers. [*Lyngstrand bows and goes through the garden gate, out to the left.*]

ARNHOLM [*rises and goes up to Ellida*] I can see that this has pained you deeply, my dear Mrs. Wangel.

ELLIDA. Oh yes, I suppose you may put it so, although —

ARNHOLM. But after all, it is only what you must have been prepared for.

ELLIDA [*looks at him in surprise*] Prepared for?

ARNHOLM. Yes, so I should think.

ELLIDA. Prepared for his returning — ? Returning in such a way?

ARNHOLM. Why, what in the world — ! Is it that crazy sculptor's cock-and-bull story — ?

ELLIDA. Ah, my dear Arnholm, he is perhaps not so crazy as you think.

ARNHOLM. Can it be this nonsense about the dead man that has moved you so much? I thought it was —

ELLIDA. What did you think?

ARNHOLM. Of course, I thought that was only a blind on your part. I fancied you were pained by the discovery that a family anniversary was being celebrated without your knowledge — that your husband and his children are living a life of memories in which you have no share.

ELLIDA. Oh no, no; that must be as it may. I have no right to claim my husband for myself alone.

ARNHOLM. Yet it seems to me you ought to have that right.

ELLIDA. Yes; but as a matter of fact I haven't. That is the thing. I too live a life — in which the others have no part.

ARNHOLM. You! [*More softly*] Am I to understand that — you — you do not really love your husband?

ELLIDA. Oh yes, yes — I have come to love him with my whole heart! And that is just why it is so terrible — so inexplicable — so absolutely inconceivable — !

ARNHOLM. Now you must tell me all your troubles without reserve! Will you not, Mrs. Wangel?

ELLIDA. I cannot, dear friend — not now, at any rate. Sometime, perhaps. [*Boletta comes out by the veranda, and down into the garden.*]

BOLETTA. Father is coming from the surgery now. Shan't we all sit together in the garden-room?

ELLIDA. Yes, let us.

[*Wangel, who has changed his clothes, comes with Hilda from the left, behind the house.*]

WANGEL. Well now, here I am, a free man! A glass of something cool wouldn't come amiss now.

ELLIDA. Wait a moment. [*She returns to the arbor and brings out the bouquet.*]

HILDA. Oh, I say! All those lovely flowers! Where did you get them?

ELLIDA. I got them from Lyngstrand the sculptor, my dear Hilda.

HILDA [*starting*] From Lyngstrand?

BOLETTA [*uneasily*] Has Lyngstrand been here — again?

ELLIDA [*with a half-smile*] Yes. He came to bring this bouquet, — a birthday offering, you know.

BOLETTA [*glancing at Hilda*] Oh — !

HILDA [*mutters*] The beast!

WANGEL [*in painful embarrassment, to Ellida*] H'm — Well, you see — I must tell you, my darling Ellida —

ELLIDA [*interrupting*] Come along, girls! Let us put my flowers in water, with the others. [*She goes up on to the veranda.*]

BOLETTA [*softly to Hilda*] She is really good after all, you see.

HILDA [*half aloud, looking angry*] Monkey-tricks! She's only putting it on to please father.

WANGEL [*up on the veranda, presses Ellida's hand*] Thank you — thank you — ! I thank you from my heart for this, Ellida.

ELLIDA [*arranging the flowers*] Oh, nonsense, — why should I not join with you in keeping — mother's birthday?

ARNHOLM. H'm — ! [*He goes up to Wangel and Ellida. Boletta and Hilda remain below in the garden.*]

CURTAIN.

ACT TWO.

Up at the Prospect, a wooded height behind the town. Towards the back stand a landmark and a weathervane. Large stones for seats are placed round the landmark and in the foreground. Far below in the background the outer fiord is seen, with islands and jutting promontories. The open sea is not visible. A summer night with clear twilight. There is a tinge of orange in the upper air and over the mountain peaks in the far distance. The sound of quartette-singing is faintly heard from the lower slopes on the right.

Young people from the town, ladies and gentlemen, come in couples up from the right, pass the landmark conversing familiarly, and go out to the left. Shortly afterwards Ballested appears, acting as guide to a party of foreign tourists. He is loaded with the ladies' shawls and satchels.

BALLESTED [*pointing upward with his stick*] *Sehen Sie, meine Herrschaften* — over *dort liegt eine andere* height. *Das willen wir besteigen* too, *un herunter* — [*He continues in English, and leads the party out to the right.*]

[*Hilda comes quickly up the slope on the right, stops, and looks backward. Presently Boletta comes up the same way.*]

BOLETTA. My dear Hilda, why should we run away from Lyngstrand?

HILDA. Because I can't endure to walk up hill so slowly. Look — look at him crawling up.

BOLETTA. Oh, you know how ill he is.

HILDA. Do you think it's very serious?

BOLETTA. Yes, I am sure it is.

HILDA. He consulted father this afternoon. I wonder what father thinks of him.

BOLETTA. Father told me that he has a hardening of the

lungs — or something of that sort. He won't last very long, father says.

HILDA. Did he really say so? Well now, that's exactly what I've been thinking.

BOLETTA. But for heaven's sake don't let him suspect anything.

HILDA. Oh, how can you think I would. [*In a lower tone*] There! — now Hans has managed to clamber up. Hans — ! Can't you see by the look of him that his name is Hans?

BOLETTA [*whispers*] Do be good now! I warn you!

[*Lyngstrand enters from the right, a parasol in his hand.*]

LYNGSTRAND. I must beg your pardon, young ladies, for not being able to keep up with you.

HILDA. So you have got a parasol now?

LYNGSTRAND. It's your mother's. She said I might use it for a stick, as I hadn't brought one with me.

BOLETTA. Are they still down there? Father and the others?

LYNGSTRAND. Yes. Your father went into the restaurant for a moment, and the others are sitting outside listening to the music; but they'll come up by-and-by, your mother said.

HILDA [*who is standing looking at him*] I suppose you are very tired now?

LYNGSTRAND. Yes, I almost think I am a little tired. I really believe I must sit down a bit. [*He seats himself on a stone, in front to the right.*]

HILDA [*stands before him*] Do you know that there's to be dancing presently, down by the band-stand?

LYNGSTRAND. Yes, I heard something of it.

HILDA. I suppose you are very fond of dancing?

BOLETTA [*who is wandering about picking small flowers among the heather*] Oh, Hilda — let Mr. Lyngstrand get his breath.

LYNGSTRAND [*to Hilda*] Yes, Miss Hilda, I should like very much to dance — if only I could.

HILDA. Oh, I see; you have never learned.

LYNGSTRAND. No, I haven't. But that was not what I meant. I meant that I can't dance on account of my chest.

HILDA. On account of that "lesion" you spoke of?

LYNGSTRAND. Yes, that's it.

HILDA. Does this "lesion" make you very unhappy?

LYNGSTRAND. Oh no, I can't say it does. [*Smiling*] For I believe it is that which makes everybody so kind and friendly and helpful to me.

HILDA. Yes; and of course it's not a bit serious.

LYNGSTRAND. No, not serious in the least. I could see quite well that your father thought so too.

HILDA. And it will pass off as soon as you go abroad?

LYNGSTRAND. Yes; it will pass off.

BOLETTA [*with flowers in her hand*] Look at these, Mr. Lyngstrand — here is one for your button-hole.

LYNGSTRAND. Oh, a thousand thanks, Miss Wangel! You are really too kind.

HILDA [*looking down the hill to the right*] Here they are, coming up the path.

BOLETTA [*also looking down*] I hope they know where to turn off. No, they are going the wrong way.

LYNGSTRAND [*rises*] I'll run down to the turning and call out to them.

HILDA. You'll have to call very loud then.

BOLETTA. No, you had better not. You'll only tire yourself again.

LYNGSTRAND. Oh, it's so easy going downhill. [*He goes out to the right.*]

HILDA. Yes, downhill. [*Looks after him*] Now he's jumping too! And it never occurs to him that he will have to come up again.

BOLETTA. Poor creature — !

HILDA. If Lyngstrand were to propose to you, would you have him?

BOLETTA. Are you out of your senses?

HILDA. Oh, I mean, of course, if he hadn't this "lesion" — and if he weren't going to die so soon. Would you have him then?

BOLETTA. I think you had better have him.

HILDA. No, I'm bothered if I would. He hasn't a rap. He hasn't enough to live upon himself.

BOLETTA. Why are you always so much taken up with him then?

HILDA. Oh, that's only on account of his "lesion."

BOLETTA. I have never noticed that you pity him a bit.

HILDA. No more I do. But it's so tempting to me —

BOLETTA. What is?

HILDA. To look at him, and get him to say that it's not serious, and that he's going abroad and going to be an artist. He's perfectly convinced of all that, and as happy as possible about it. And to know that nothing will come of it after all; nothing whatever; that he won't live long enough — I find that so thrilling to think of.

BOLETTA. Thrilling!

HILDA. Yes. I find it thrilling — I take that liberty.

BOLETTA. Fie, Hilda, you are really a horrid child!

HILDA. Well, that's what I want to be — just for spite! [*Looks down*] Ah, at last! Arnholm doesn't seem to enjoy climbing. [*Turns round*] Oh, by-the-bye — what do you think I noticed about Arnholm while we were at dinner?

BOLETTA. What?

HILDA. Only think, he's beginning to turn bald — right on the crown of his head.

BOLETTA. Oh, rubbish! I'm sure he isn't.

HILDA. Yes he is. And he has wrinkles here, round both his eyes. Good heavens, Boletta, how could you be so gone on him when he was your tutor?

BOLETTA [*smiling*] Yes, can you understand it? I remember once shedding bitter tears because he said he thought Boletta an ugly name.

HILDA. Think of that! [*Looks down again*] I say! Look there! Just look! — There's "the lady from the sea" walking with him — not with father — and jabbering away to him. I wonder whether those two aren't a bit sweet on each other.

BOLETTA. You ought really to be ashamed of yourself.

How dare you say such things about her? We were beginning to get on so well together —

HILDA. Oh, indeed! — Don't you believe it, my girl! I tell you we shall never get on well with her. She doesn't suit us, nor we her. Heaven knows what tempted father to drag her into the house! — I shouldn't wonder a bit if she were to go mad on our hands some fine day.

BOLETTA. Mad? What makes you say such a thing?

HILDA. Oh, there would be nothing so wonderful about it. Didn't her mother go mad? She died mad, I know.

BOLETTA. Yes, I should like to know what you don't poke your nose into. All I say is, don't go chattering about it. Be good now — for father's sake. Do you hear, Hilda?

[*Wangel, Ellida, Arnholm, and Lyngstrand come up from the right.*]

ELLIDA [*points away towards the background*] It lies out there.

ARNHOLM. Yes, of course; it must be in that direction.

ELLIDA. Out there lies the sea.

BOLETTA [*to Arnholm*] Don't you think it's pretty up here?

ARNHOLM. I should rather say grand — a glorious view!

WANGEL. I dare say you have never been up here before?

ARNHOLM. No, never. In my time I doubt if it was accessible. There wasn't even a footpath.

WANGEL. And no grounds laid out either. We have done all that in the last few years

BOLETTA. Over there, on the Pilot's Knoll, the view is even finer.

WANGEL. Shall we go there, Ellida?

ELLIDA [*seats herself upon a stone to the right*] Thank you, I won't go. But you others ought to. I shall stay here in the meantime.

WANGEL. Very well; then I'll stay with you. The girls can do the honors for Arnholm.

BOLETTA. Do you care to come with us, Mr. Arnholm?

ARNHOLM. Yes, I should like to. Is there a path up there too?

BOLETTA. Oh yes; a good broad path.

HILDA. There's plenty of room for two people to go arm-in-arm.

ARNHOLM [*jestingly*] I wonder if there is, little Miss Hilda? [*To Boletta*] Shall we two try if she is right?

BOLETTA [*repressing a smile*] Yes, if you like. Let us. [*They go out to the left, arm-in-arm.*]

HILDA [*to Lyngstrand*] Shall we go too — ?

LYNGSTRAND. Arm-in-arm — ?

HILDA. Why not? I don't mind.

LYNGSTRAND [*gives her his arm, and laughs with pleasure*] This is great fun, isn't it?

HILDA. Great fun —?

LYNGSTRAND. Why, it looks exactly as if we were engaged.

HILDA. I suppose you have never given a lady your arm before, Mr. Lyngstrand. [*They go out to the left.*]

WANGEL [*who is standing at the back, beside the landmark*] Dear Ellida, now we have a little time to ourselves —

ELLIDA. Yes, come and sit here beside me.

WANGEL [*seats himself*] It's so open and peaceful here. Now let us have a little talk.

ELLIDA. What about?

WANGEL. About you; and about our relation to each other, Ellida. I see well enough that this state of things cannot continue.

ELLIDA. What would you have in its place?

WANGEL. Full confidence, dear. A life in common — such as we used to live.

ELLIDA. Oh, if that could only be! But it's so utterly impossible!

WANGEL. I think I understand you. From certain things you have let fall now and then, I believe I do.

ELLIDA [*vehemently*] No, you don't! Don't say that you understand —!

WANGEL. Oh yes. Yours is an upright nature, Ellida. You have a loyal heart.

ELLIDA. Yes, I have.

WANGEL. Any relation in which you can feel secure and happy must be a full and perfect one.

ELLIDA [*looking anxiously at him*] Well, — and then?

WANGEL. You are not fitted to be a man's second wife.

ELLIDA. What makes you think of that now?

WANGEL. The suspicion has often crossed my mind; but to-day I saw it clearly. The children's little commemoration — you looked on me as a sort of accomplice. — Well, yes; a man's memories are not to be wiped out — not mine, at all events. It is not in my nature.

ELLIDA. I know that. Oh, I know it so well.

WANGEL. But you are mistaken, none the less. It seems to you almost as though the children's mother were still alive. You feel her invisible presence in our midst. You think that my heart is equally divided between you and her. It is this idea that revolts you. You see, as it were, something immoral in our relation; and that is why you cannot, or will not, live with me any more as my wife.

ELLIDA [*rises*] Have you seen all this, Wangel? Seen through all this?

WANGEL. Yes, to-day I have at last seen through it — into the very depths.

ELLIDA. Into the very depths, you say. Oh, you mustn't think that.

WANGEL [*rises*] I know very well that there is more than this, dear Ellida.

ELLIDA [*apprehensively*] You know that there is more?

WANGEL. Yes. There is this: that you cannot endure your surroundings here. The mountains oppress you and weigh upon your spirits. There is not light enough for you here — the horizon is not wide enough — the air not strong and stimulating enough for you.

ELLIDA. There you are quite right. Night and day, winter and summer, it is upon me — this haunting home-sickness for the sea.

WANGEL. I know it well, dear Ellida. [*Lays his hand upon her head*] And therefore the poor sick child must go to its own home again.

ELLIDA. How do you mean?

WANGEL. Quite literally. We will move.

ELIDA. Move!

WANGEL. Yes. Out somewhere by the open sea, — to some place where you may find a real home, after your own heart.

ELLIDA. Oh, my dear, you mustn't think of that! It's quite impossible. You could never live happily anywhere in the world but here.

WANGEL. That must be as it may. And besides — do you think I can live happily here — without you?

ELLIDA. But here I am; and here I will remain. Am I not yours?

WANGEL. Are you mine, Ellida?

ELLIDA. Oh, please say no more of that scheme. Here you have all that is life and breath to you. Your whole life-work lies here, and here only.

WANGEL. That must be as it may, I say. We will move from here — move seaward somewhere. My mind is made up beyond recall, dear Ellida.

ELLIDA. Oh, but what do you suppose we shall gain by that?

WANGEL. You will regain your health and peace of mind.

ELLIDA. I doubt it. But you yourself! Think of yourself too. What would you gain?

WANGEL. I should regain you, my dearest.

ELLIDA. But that you cannot do! No, no, you cannot, Wangel! That is just the terrible, the heartbreaking part of it.

WANGEL. That remains to be seen. If you are haunted by such thoughts here, then assuredly there is nothing for it but to get you away from here. And the sooner the better. My mind is made up beyond recall, I tell you.

ELLIDA. No! Rather than that, — Heaven help me — I will tell you everything without reserve, exactly as it is.

WANGEL. Yes, yes — do!

ELLIDA. You shall not make yourself unhappy for my sake; especially as it would do us no good, after all.

WANGEL. You have promised to tell me everything — exactly as it stands.

ELLIDA. I will tell you as well as I can, — and as far as I understand things. — Come here and sit by me. [*They seat themselves upon the stones.*]

WANGEL. Well, Ellida? Well — ?

ELLIDA. That day when you came out there and asked me if I could and would be yours — you spoke to me frankly and openly about your first marriage. You said it had been very happy.

WANGEL. And so it was.

ELLIDA. Yes, yes; I do not doubt it, dear. That is not why I speak of it now. I only want to remind you that I, on my side, was frank with you. I told you quite openly that I had once in my life cared for some one else. That it had come to — a sort of betrothal between us.

WANGEL. A sort of — ?

ELLIDA. Yes, something of the kind. Well, it lasted only a very short time. He went away; and afterwards I broke it off. All this I told you.

WANGEL. But, dear Ellida, why go back upon all this? After all, it did not really concern me. I have never even asked you who he was.

ELLIDA. No, you have not. You are always so considerate to me.

WANGEL [*smiling*] Well, in this case, — I scarcely needed to be told his name.

ELLIDA. His name?

WANGEL. Out at Skioldvik and in those parts there were not many to choose from. Or rather, there was only one man —

ELLIDA. I suppose you think it was — Arnholm.

WANGEL. Yes — was it not?

ELLIDA. No.

WANGEL. It was not? Well then I am certainly at a loss.

ELLIDA. Do you remember that, in the late autumn one year, a large American ship came into Skioldvik for repairs?

WANGEL. Yes, I remember it well. It was on board

her that the captain was found murdered in his cabin one morning. I remember going to make the post-mortem.

ELLIDA. Yes, you did.

WANGEL. It was said to be the second mate who had killed him.

ELLIDA. No one can tell that! It was never proved.

WANGEL. No; but I think there is no doubt about it. Else why should he have gone and drowned himself?

ELLIDA. He did not drown himself. He escaped in a vessel bound for the north.

WANGEL [*starts*] How do you know that?

ELLIDA [*with an effort*] Because, Wangel — because it was that second mate to whom I — was betrothed.

WANGEL [*starting up*] What do you say? Can this be possible?

ELLIDA. Yes, — he was the man.

WANGEL. But how in the world, Ellida — ? How could you do such a thing! Go and engage yourself to such a man as that! A man you knew nothing on earth about! — What was his name?

ELLIDA. He called himself Friman[1] then. Afterwards, in his letters, he signed himself Alfred Johnston.

WANGEL. And where did he come from?

ELLIDA. From Finmark, he said. He was born over in Finland though. He had come across the frontier as a child, — with his father I think.

WANGEL. He was a Quæn, then.

ELLIDA. Yes, I believe they are called so.

WANGEL. What more do you know of him?

ELLIDA. Only that he went to sea very young, and that he had made long voyages.

WANGEL. Nothing else?

ELLIDA. No; we never talked about such things.

WANGEL. What did you talk about then?

ELLIDA. Mainly about the sea.

WANGEL. Ah —! About the sea?

ELLIDA. About storm and calm. About dark nights at sea. About the sea in the glittering sunshine, too. But we

[1] Pronounce *Freeman.*

talked most about the whales, and the porpoises, and the seals that lie out upon the reefs and bask in the midday sun. And then we spoke of the gulls and the eagles, and all the other sea-birds, you know. And — is it not strange? — when we talked of such things, it seemed to me as though both the sea-animals and the sea-birds were akin to him.

WANGEL. And you yourself — ?

ELLIDA. Yes, I almost thought that I, too, was akin to all of them.

WANGEL. Yes, yes. — And that was how you came to betroth yourself to him?

ELLIDA. Yes; he said I was to do it.

WANGEL. Was to? Had you no will of your own?

ELLIDA. Not when he was near. Oh — afterwards it all seemed so utterly inexplicable to me.

WANGEL. Did you see him often?

ELLIDA. No, not very often. He went over the lighthouse one day; that is how I came to know him. And afterwards we used to meet occasionally. But then came this affair about the captain; and he had to go away.

WANGEL. Oh yes, let me hear about that!

ELLIDA. It was in the dusk of the early morning that I got a line from him. It said that I must come out to him at Bratthammer [1] — you know, the headland between the lighthouse and Skioldvik.

WANGEL. Yes, yes — I know it well.

ELLIDA. I must come there immediately, the note said, for he wanted to speak to me.

WANGEL. And you went?

ELLIDA. Yes. I could not help it. Well — he told me that he had stabbed the captain in the night.

WANGEL. He told you himself? Said it straight out!

ELLIDA. Yes. But he had only done what was right and just, he said.

WANGEL. Right and just? What reason did he give, then, for stabbing him?

ELLIDA. He would not tell me the reason. He said it was not a thing for me to hear about.

[1] Pronounce *Bratt-hammer.*

WANGEL. And you believed him, on his bare word?

ELLIDA. Yes, I never thought of doubting him. Well, at all events he had to go away. But when he was on the point of saying good-by to me — No, you could never imagine what he did.

WANGEL. Well, tell me then.

ELLIDA. He took a key-ring out of his pocket, and drew off his finger a ring he used to wear. Then he took from me a little ring that I had, and these two he slipped together on the key-ring. And then he said that now we two should together be wedded to the sea.

WANGEL. Wedded —?

ELLIDA. Yes, so he said. And then he flung the large ring and the two small ones as far as ever he could into the deep water.

WANGEL. And you, Ellida? Did you agree to that?

ELLIDA. Yes, would you believe it, I thought at the time that it was all as it should be. — But, thank heaven, then he went away!

WANGEL. And when once he was away?

ELLIDA. Oh, you may be sure I soon came to my senses again. I saw how utterly stupid and meaningless the whole thing had been.

WANGEL. But you said something about letters. Did you hear from him afterwards?

ELLIDA. Yes, I heard from him. First, I got a line or two from Archangel. He said nothing but that he was going over to America; and he told me where to address an answer.

WANGEL. Did you write?

ELLIDA. Immediately. I said, of course, that all must be over between us — that he must never think of me again, as I meant never to think any more of him.

WANGEL. And did he write again, in spite of that?

ELLIDA. Yes, he wrote again.

WANGEL. And what was his answer to what you had said?

ELLIDA. Not a word. He wrote just as if I had never broken with him. He told me quite calmly that I must wait for him. When he was ready for me he would let me know, and then I was to come to him at once.

WANGEL. Then he would not release you?

ELLIDA. No. So I wrote again, almost word for word the same as before: only more strongly.

WANGEL. And did he give way then?

ELLIDA. Oh no, far from it. He wrote as calmly as before. Never a word about my having broken with him. Then I saw it was useless, so I wrote to him no more.

WANGEL. And did not hear from him either?

ELLIDA. Yes, I have had three letters from him since. Once he wrote from California and once from China. The last letter I got from him was from Australia. He said he was going to the gold-mines; and since then I have heard nothing from him.

WANGEL. That man must have had an extraordinary power over you, Ellida.

ELLIDA. Oh yes, yes. That terrible man!

WANGEL. But you must not think any more about it. Never! Promise me that, my dear, my precious Ellida! We will try another cure for you now — a fresher air than this of the inner fiord. The salt-laden, sweeping sea-breezes, dear! What do you say to that?

ELLIDA. Oh, don't speak of it! Don't think of such a thing! There is no help for me in that! I know, I feel, that I should not be able to throw it off out there either.

WANGEL. To throw what off, dear? What do you mean?

ELLIDA. I mean the terror of him. His unfathomable power over my soul —

WANGEL. But you have thrown it off! Long ago; when you broke with him. It is all over, long ago.

ELLIDA [*springs up*] No, that is just what it is not!

WANGEL. Not over!

ELLIDA. No, Wangel — it is not over! And I am afraid it never will be over. Never in this life.

WANGEL [*in a choked voice*] Do you mean to say that you have never in your heart of hearts been able to forget that strange man?

ELLIDA. I had forgotten him. But then, all at once, he seemed to come again.

WANGEL. How long ago is that?

ELLIDA. It is about three years ago now, or a little more. It was whilst — before the child was born.

WANGEL. Ah! It was then, was it? In that case, Ellida — I begin to understand much more clearly.

ELLIDA. You are wrong, dear! This thing that has come over me — oh, I don't think it can ever be understood.

WANGEL [*looks at her, pained*] To think that for all these three years your heart has been given to another man. To another! Not to me, — but to another!

ELLIDA. Oh, you utterly misunderstand me. I love no one but you.

WANGEL [*in a low tone*] How is it, then, that for all that time you have refused to live with me as my wife?

ELLIDA. That is because of the dread the strange man has cast over me.

WANGEL. Dread —?

ELLIDA. Yes, dread. Such a dread, such a terror, as can arise only from the sea. For now I must tell you, Wangel — [*The young townspeople come back from the left, bow, and go out to the right. With them come Arnholm, Boletta, Hilda, and Lyngstrand.*]

BOLETTA [*as they pass by*] What! Still up here?

ELLIDA. Yes, it's so delightfully cool up here on the heights.

ARNHOLM. For our part, we are going down to have a dance.

WANGEL. Very well. We will come too, in a little while.

HILDA. Good-by for the present then.

ELLIDA. Mr. Lyngstrand — will you please wait a moment?

[*Lyngstrand stops. Arnholm, Boletta, and Hilda go out to the right.*]

ELLIDA [*to Lyngstrand*] Are you going to dance too?

LYNGSTRAND. No, Mrs. Wangel, I'm afraid I must not.

ELLIDA. No, you ought to be careful. That weakness in your chest — you have not quite got over it yet.

LYNGSTRAND. No, not thoroughly.

ELLIDA [*somewhat hesitatingly*] How long is it now since you made that voyage — ?

LYNGSTRAND. When I got the lesion?

ELLIDA. Yes, that voyage you were telling us about this morning.

LYNGSTRAND. Oh, well, it must be about — wait a bit — yes, it was just three years ago.

ELLIDA. Three years?

LYNGSTRAND. Or a little more. We left America in February, and we were wrecked in March. We got into the equinoctial gales.

ELLIDA [*looking at Wangel*] You see that was the time —

WANGEL. But, my dear Ellida —?

ELLIDA. Well, don't let us detain you, Mr. Lyngstrand. Go; but don't dance.

LYNGSTRAND. No, I shall only look on. [*He goes out to the right.*]

WANGEL. Dear Ellida — why did you cross-question him about that voyage?

ELLIDA. Johnston was in the same ship. Of that I am perfectly certain.

WANGEL. What makes you think so?

ELLIDA [*without answering*] He came to know, during the voyage, that I had married some one else, while he was away. And then — at the very same moment, this came upon me!

WANGEL. This dread?

ELLIDA. Yes. Sometimes, without the smallest warning, I suddenly see him stand bodily before me. Or rather a little to one side. He never looks at me; he is only there.

WANGEL. How does he appear to you?

ELLIDA. Just as I saw him last.

WANGEL. Ten years ago?

ELLIDA. Yes. Out at Bratthammer. I see his scarf-pin most distinctly of all, with a large, bluish-white pearl in it. That pearl is like a dead fish's eye. And it seems to glare at me.

WANGEL. Good God —! You are more ill than I thought; more ill than you know yourself, Ellida.

ELLIDA. Yes, yes, — help me if you can! For I feel it closing round me more and more.

WANGEL. And you have been in this state for three whole years. You have suffered this secret anguish without confiding in me!

ELLIDA. Oh, I could not! Not till now, when it became necessary for your own sake. If I had told you all this — then I must also have told you — the unspeakable.

WANGEL. The unspeakable —?

ELLIDA [*evasively*] No, no, no! Do not ask! Only one thing more, and I have done. — Wangel — how shall we fathom the mystery — of the child's eyes —?

WANGEL. My own dear Ellida, I assure you it was pure imagination on your part. The child had exactly the same eyes as other normal children.

ELLIDA. No, it had not! How could you help seeing it? The child's eyes changed color with the sea. If the fiord lay in a sunny calm, the eyes were calm and sunny. And the same way in storms. — Oh, I saw it well enough, if you did not.

WANGEL [*humoring her*] H'm, — perhaps so. But even if it were? What then?

ELLIDA [*softly, and drawing nearer to him*] I have seen eyes like that before.

WANGEL. When? And where —?

ELLIDA. Out at Bratthammer. Ten years ago.

WANGEL [*recoils a step*] What do you —!

ELLIDA [*whispers, trembling*] The child had the strange man's eyes.

WANGEL [*cries out involuntarily*] Ellida —

ELLIDA [*clasps her hands over her head in despair*] Now you can surely understand why I never will, — never dare live with you as your wife. [*She turns hastily and rushes down the hill to the right.*]

WANGEL [*hastens after her and calls*] Ellida! Ellida! My poor unhappy Ellida.

CURTAIN

ACT THREE.

A remote corner of Doctor Wangel's garden. The place is damp, marshy, and overshadowed by large old trees. To the right is seen the edge of a stagnant pond. A low open fence divides the garden from the footpath and fiord in the background. In the farthest distance, beyond the fiord, mountain ranges rise into peaks. It is late afternoon, almost evening.

Boletta sits sewing upon a stone seat to the left. On the seat lie a couple of books and a work-basket. Hilda and Lyngstrand, both with fishing-tackle, stand by the edge of the pond.

HILDA [*makes a sign to Lyngstrand*] Stand still. I see a big one there.

LYNGSTRAND [*looking*] Where is it?

HILDA [*points*] Can't you see — down there. And look! I declare there's another! [*Looks away through the trees*] Ugh — there he comes to frighten them away!

BOLETTA [*looks up*] Who is coming?

HILDA. Your tutor, miss!

BOLETTA. My —?

HILDA. Yes; thank goodness he was never mine!

[*Arnholm comes forward among the trees on the right.*]

ARNHOLM. Are there fish in the pond now?

HILDA. Yes, there are some very old carp.

ARNHOLM. Ah, so the old carp are still alive?

HILDA. Yes; they're tough, I can tell you. But now we're going to put an end to some of them.

ARNHOLM. You ought rather to try the fiord.

LYNGSTRAND. No, the pond — the pond is more mysterious, as you might call it.

HILDA. Yes, it's more thrilling here. — Have you just been having a bathe?

ARNHOLM. Precisely. I've come straight from the bathing-house.

HILDA. I suppose you kept within the enclosure?

ARNHOLM. Yes, I'm no great swimmer.

HILDA. Can you swim on your back?

ARNHOLM. No.

HILDA. I can. [*To Lyngstrand*] Let us try over there on the other side. [*They skirt the pond, out to the right.*]

ARNHOLM [*advances to Boletta*] You are all alone, Boletta?

BOLETTA. Oh yes, I generally am.

ARNHOLM. Is not your mother in the garden?

BOLETTA. No; I think she is out walking with father.

ARNHOLM. How is she this afternoon?

BOLETTA. I don't quite know. I forgot to ask.

ARNHOLM. What are the books you have there?

BOLETTA. Oh, one is a botanical book, and the other a descriptive geography.

ARNHOLM. Are you fond of that kind of reading?

BOLETTA. Yes, when I can find time for it — But of course the housekeeping must come first.

ARNHOLM. But does not your mother — your stepmother — help you with that?

BOLETTA. No, it is my work. I had to look after it during the two years father was alone; and so it has continued ever since.

ARNHOLM. But you are as fond as ever of reading?

BOLETTA. Yes, I read all the useful books I can get hold of. One wants to know a little about the world. Here we live so entirely outside of everything, — or almost entirely.

ARNHOLM. No, my dear Boletta, don't say that.

BOLETTA. But I do say so. I don't see much difference between our life and the life of the carp in the pond there. They have the fiord close beside them, where the great free shoals of fish sweep out and in. But the poor tame house-fishes know nothing of all that; and they can never join in.

ARNHOLM. I don't think it would agree with them at all if they did get out into the fiord.

BOLETTA. Oh, they might take their chance of that, I should think.

ARNHOLM. Besides, you can't say that you are so utterly out of the world here. Not in summer, at all events. This place is a sort of local center, nowadays, in the life of the world — a point of convergence for many passing streams.

BOLETTA [*smiling*] Oh, you are in the passing stream yourself; it is easy for you to make game of us.

ARNHOLM. I make game —? What puts that into your head?

BOLETTA. Why, all this about a center, and a point of convergence for the life of the world, is simply what you have heard people say in the town. They are always talking like that.

ARNHOLM. Yes, frankly, I have noticed as much.

BOLETTA. But there's really not a word of truth in it, you know — not for us who live here constantly. What is it to us that the great outside world passes our doors on its way to the midnight sun? We cannot join in the stream. There is no midnight sun for us. Oh no; we must be content to linger our lives out, here in our carp-pond.

ARNHOLM [*seats himself beside her*] Tell me now, dear Boletta — I wonder if there is not something or other, — some particular thing I mean — that you are all the time longing for, here at home?

BOLETTA. Well, perhaps there may be.

ARNHOLM. Then what is it? What are you longing for?

BOLETTA. Chiefly to get away.

ARNHOLM. That before anything?

BOLETTA. Yes. And next to learn a little more; to gain some real insight into things in general.

ARNHOLM. When I used to read with you, your father often said that he would let you go to college.

BOLETTA. Oh yes, poor father, — he says so many things. But when it comes to the point, then — There is no real energy in father.

ARNHOLM. No, unfortunately — I suppose there is not. But have you ever talked to him about this? Put serious pressure on him, I mean?

BOLETTA. No, I can't say that I have.

ARNHOLM. Well now really, Boletta, you ought to do so, before it is too late. Why don't you?

BOLETTA. Oh, because there is no real energy in me either, I suppose. I probably take after father in that.

ARNHOLM. H'm — I wonder whether you don't do yourself injustice there?

BOLETTA. Oh no, I'm sorry to say. And then father has so little time to think about me and my future — and not much inclination either. He puts things of that sort aside as much as he can; he is so entirely taken up with Ellida —

ARNHOLM. With whom —? How —?

BOLETTA. I mean that he and my stepmother — [*breaking off*] Father and mother lead a life of their own, you see.

ARNHOLM. Well, so much the more reason for you to see about getting away.

BOLETTA. Yes, but at the same time I don't feel as if I had the right to go away — to leave father.

ARNHOLM. But, my dear Boletta, you will have to leave him some time, in any case; and since that is so, why delay —?

BOLETTA. Yes, I suppose there is nothing else for it. Of course I ought to think of myself too, and try to find a position of some sort. When once father is gone I shall have no one to depend on. — But poor father, — I dread the thought of leaving him.

ARNHOLM. Dread —?

BOLETTA. Yes, for his own sake.

ARNHOLM. But, bless me, what about your stepmother? She will still be with him.

BOLETTA. Yes, that's true. But she is not at all fitted for all that mother knew so well how to do. There are so many things she doesn't see — or perhaps will not see — or trouble herself about. I don't know which way to put it.

ARNHOLM. H'm, — I think I understand what you mean.

BOLETTA. Poor father, — he is weak in certain ways. I dare say you have noticed that yourself. You see he hasn't enough work to fill up his whole time; and then she is quite

incapable of being any support to him. — That is partly his own fault, however.

ARNHOLM. How so?

BOLETTA. Oh, father always likes to see cheerful faces around him; there must be sunshine and contentment in the house, he says. So I am afraid he often lets her have medicine that does her no good in the long run.

ARNHOLM. Do you really think so?

BOLETTA. Yes. I can't get rid of the idea. She is so strange at times. [*Vehemently*] But it does seem hard, does it not, that I should have to stay on at home here? It does not in reality help father at all; and I can't but feel that I have duties towards myself too.

ARNHOLM. I'll tell you what, my dear Boletta, — we must talk all this over more thoroughly.

BOLETTA. Oh, that won't help much; I dare say I was created to pass my life here in the carp-pond.

ARNHOLM. Not at all. It depends entirely upon yourself.

BOLETTA [*eagerly*] Do you think so?

ARNHOLM. Yes, believe me; it lies wholly and solely in your own hands.

BOLETTA. Oh, if it only did —! Do you mean that you will put in a good word for me with father?

ARNHOLM. I will do that too. But first of all I want to speak frankly and without reserve to you yourself, my dear Boletta. [*Looks out to the left*] Hush! Let no one notice anything; we'll finish our talk by-and-by.

[*Ellida enters from the left. She wears no hat, but has a light shawl thrown over her head and shoulders.*]

ELLIDA [*with nervous animation*] How nice it is here! How delightful!

ARNHOLM [*rising*] Have you been out walking?

ELLIDA. Yes, a long, long splendid walk with Wangel. And now we are going out for a sail.

BOLETTA. Won't you sit down?

ELLIDA. No, thank you; I couldn't sit.

BOLETTA [*moving along the bench*] There's plenty of room.

ELLIDA [*walking about*] No, no, no, I couldn't sit; I couldn't sit.

ARNHOLM. Your walk has surely done you good; it seems to have exhilarated you.

ELLIDA. Oh, I fell so thoroughly well. I feel so unspeakably happy! So safe! So safe — [*Looks out to the left*] What large steamer is that coming in?

BOLETTA [*rises and looks out*] It must be the big English boat.

ARNHOLM. They are mooring her to the buoy. Does she generally stop here?

BOLETTA. Only for half an hour; she goes farther up the fiord.

ELLIDA. And then outward again — to-morrow; out on the great open sea; right over the sea. Think of going with her! If one only could! If one only could!

ARNHOLM. Have you never taken a long sea-voyage, Mrs. Wangel?

ELLIDA. Never in my life; only little trips in the fiords.

BOLETTA [*with a sigh*] Oh no, we have to put up with the dry land.

ARNHOLM. Well, at any rate, that is our natural element.

ELLIDA. No, I don't think so at all.

ARNHOLM. Not dry land?

ELLIDA. No, I don't believe it. I believe that if men had only accustomed themselves from the first to live their life on the sea — or even in the sea — we should by this time have been far more perfect than we are; — both better and happier.

ARNHOLM. Do you really believe that?

ELLIDA. Well, at any rate, it is a theory of mine. I have often talked of it with Wangel.

ARNHOLM. Indeed! And he —?

ELLIDA. Oh, he thinks there may be something in it.

ARNHOLM [*joking*] Well, who knows? But what's done is done. We have once for all taken the wrong turning and become land animals instead of sea animals. All things considered, I'm afraid it is too late now to rectify the error.

ELLIDA. Yes, that is the mournful truth. And I believe

people have an instinctive feeling of it themselves — it haunts them like a secret sorrow and regret. Believe me, this lies at the very root of the melancholy of mankind. I am sure it does.

ARNHOLM. But my dear Mrs. Wangel, — I have never noticed that people are so profoundly melancholy. I should say, on the contrary, that most people take life cheerfully and lightly — with a great, calm, unconscious joy.

ELLIDA. Oh no, that is not so. That joy — it is just like our joy in the long, light summer days. It has in it the foreboding of the darkness to come. And this foreboding casts its shadow over the joy of mankind, — just as the driving scud casts its shadow over the fiord. There it lies all blue and shining; and then all of a sudden —

BOLETTA. You shouldn't let yourself dwell on such sad thoughts. You were so bright and cheerful a moment ago.

ELLIDA. Yes, yes, so I was. All this is — it's so stupid of me. [*Looks uneasily around*] If only Wangel would come down here. He promised me so faithfully; and yet he doesn't come. He must have forgotten. Dear Mr. Arnholm, won't you go and find him for me?

ARNHOLM. Yes, with pleasure.

ELLIDA. Tell him that he really must come at once; for now I cannot see him —

ARNHOLM. Not see him —?

ELLIDA. Oh, you don't understand me. When he is not present, I often can't remember what he looks like; and then it seems as though I had lost him utterly. — It's so terribly painful. Do go! [*She wanders over in the direction of the pond.*]

BOLETTA [*to Arnholm*] I will go with you; you don't know —

ARNHOLM. Oh, don't trouble; I shall manage —

BOLETTA [*in an undertone*] No, no, I am uneasy. I'm afraid he is on board the steamer.

ARNHOLM. Afraid?

BOLETTA. Yes, he generally goes to see if there is any one he knows among the passengers; and there's a refreshment bar on board —

ARNHOLM. Ah! Come along then. [*He and Boletta go out to the left. Ellida stands awhile gazing into the pond. From time to time she talks softly and in broken phrases to herself.*]

[*Outside on the footpath, beyond the garden fence, a Stranger in traveling dress enters from the left. He has bushy, reddish hair and beard, wears a Scotch cap, and has a traveling-wallet slung across his shoulder by a strap.*]

THE STRANGER [*walks slowly along by the fence, and looks into the garden. When he sees Ellida he stops, looks intently and searchingly at her, and says softly*] Good evening, Ellida!

ELLIDA [*turns round and cries out*] Oh, my dear — have you come at last!

THE STRANGER. Yes, at last.

ELLIDA [*looks at him, astonished and apprehensive*] Who are you? Are you looking for some one here?

THE STRANGER. You know I am.

ELLIDA [*taken aback*] What is this? How strangely you speak to me![1] Who is it you are looking for?

THE STRANGER. You know I am looking for you.

ELLIDA [*starts*] Ah —! [*Gazes at him a moment, staggers backwards, and breaks out into a half-smothered shriek*] The eyes! — The eyes!

THE STRANGER. Well, — are you beginning to recognize me at last? I knew you at once, Ellida.

ELLIDA. The eyes. Don't look at me like that! I will call for help.

THE STRANGER. Hush, hush! Don't be afraid. I will do you no harm.

ELLIDA [*holds her hands over her eyes*] Don't look at me like that, I say!

THE STRANGER [*leans his arms upon the garden fence*] I came with the English steamer.

ELLIDA [*glances shrinkingly at him*] What do you want with me?

[1] He has addressed her, as he does throughout, by the familiar *du*—"thou." She always uses the formal *De* in speaking to him.

THE STRANGER. I promised I would come again, as soon as I could —

ELLIDA. Go! Go away again! Never — never come here any more! I wrote to you that everything must be at end between us! Everything! You know I did!

THE STRANGER [*unmoved, without answering*] I wanted to come to you sooner, but I could not. At last I saw my way; and here I am, Ellida.

ELLIDA. What do you want with me? What are you thinking of? What have you come here for?

THE STRANGER. You know quite well that I have come to take you away.

ELLIDA [*shrinking back in terror*] To take me away! Is that what you intend?

THE STRANGER. Yes, of course.

ELLIDA. But surely you know that I am married!

THE STRANGER. Yes, I know it.

ELLIDA. And yet —! In spite of that, you have come to — to — take me away!

THE STRANGER. Yes, you see I have.

ELLIDA [*presses both her hands to her head*] Oh, this fearful — ! Oh, this terror, this terror — !

THE STRANGER. Perhaps you do not wish to come!

ELLIDA [*beside herself*] Don't look at me like that!

THE STRANGER. Do you not wish to come, I ask?

ELLIDA. No, no, no! I will not! Never to the end of time! I will not, I say! I neither can, nor will! [*Lower*] I dare not, either.

THE STRANGER [*climbs over the fence and comes into the garden*] Very well then, Ellida — let me just say one single thing before I go.

ELLIDA [*tries to escape, but cannot. She stands as if paralyzed with fear, and supports herself against a tree-trunk near the pond*] Do not touch me! Do not come near me! Stay where you are! Do not touch me, I say!

THE STRANGER [*cautiously, coming a step or two towards her*] You must not be so afraid of me, Ellida.

ELLIDA [*puts her hands before her eyes*] Do not look at me like that!

THE STRANGER. Don't be afraid, don't be afraid.

[*Doctor Wangel comes through the garden from the left.*]

WANGEL [*before he has quite emerged from among the trees*] Well, I've kept you waiting a nice time.

ELLIDA [*rushes to him, clings fast to his arm and cries*] Oh, Wangel, — save me! Save me — if you can!

WANGEL. Ellida, — what in heaven's name —!

ELLIDA. Save me, Wangel! Don't you see him? There he stands!

WANGEL [*looks at the Stranger*] That man there? [*Goes towards him*] Who are you, may I ask? And why have you come into this garden?

THE STRANGER [*indicates Ellida by a nod*] I want to speak to her.

WANGEL. Indeed. Then I suppose it was you —? [*To Ellida*] I hear a stranger called at the house and asked for you.

THE STRANGER. Yes, it was I.

WANGEL. And what do you want with my wife? [*Turns*] Do you know him, Ellida?

ELLIDA [*softly, wringing her hands*] Do I know him? Yes, yes, yes!

WANGEL [*hastily*] Well?

ELLIDA. Oh, it is he, Wangel! It is he himself! He, — you know —!

WANGEL. What? What do you say? [*Turns*] Are you the man Johnston, who was —?

THE STRANGER. Well — you can call me Johnston if you like. It is not my name, though.

WANGEL. Is it not?

THE STRANGER. Not now, it isn't.

WANGEL. And what can you want with my wife? For of course you know that the lighthouse-keeper's daughter has been married for years. And you must know, too, who her husband is.

THE STRANGER. I have known that for more than three years.

ELLIDA [*eagerly*] How did you come to know it?

THE STRANGER. I was on my way home to you. I came

across an old newspaper — one from these parts; and in it was the notice of your marriage.

ELLIDA [*looking straight before her*] My marriage — So it was that —

THE STRANGER. It came upon me very strangely. For the linking of the rings — that was a marriage, too, Ellida.

ELLIDA [*puts her hands before her face*] Oh —!

WANGEL. How dare you —?

THE STRANGER. Had you forgotten it?

ELLIDA [*cries out, as though she felt his look*] Do not stand looking at me like that!

WANGEL [*confronting him*] Be so good as to address yourself to me, and not to her. Briefly now — since you understand the situation — what can you have to do here? Why do you come here and seek out my wife?

THE STRANGER. I had promised Ellida that I would come to her as soon as I could.

WANGEL. Ellida —! Again!

THE STRANGER. And Ellida had promised faithfully to wait for me till I came.

WANGEL. I observe that you call my wife by her first name. That sort of familiarity is not usual here.

THE STRANGER. I know that very well. But as she belongs first of all to me —

WANGEL. To you! Still —!

ELLIDA [*shrinks behind Wangel*] Oh —! He will never set me free!

WANGEL. To you! You say she belongs to you!

THE STRANGER. Has she told you about the two rings? My ring and Ellida's?

WANGEL. Yes, certainly. But what then? She broke it off again afterwards. You received her letters; so you know it perfectly well.

THE STRANGER. Ellida and I were fully agreed that the linking of the rings was to be in every way as valid and binding as a marriage.

ELLIDA. But I refuse, I tell you! Never in this world will I have anything more to do with you! Do not look at me like that! I will not, I tell you!

WANGEL. You must be out of your senses if you think you can come here and found any claim upon such a piece of child's-play as that.

THE STRANGER. That is true. In the way you mean, I have certainly no claim upon her.

WANGEL. What do you want to do then? You cannot imagine that you can take her from me by force, — against her own will!

THE STRANGER. No. What would be the use of that? If Ellida is to be mine, she must come of her own free will.

ELLIDA [*starts and cries out*] Of my own free will —

WANGEL. And can you suppose —!

ELLIDA [*to herself*] My own free will —!

WANGEL. You must be out of your mind. Take yourself off! We have nothing more to do with you.

THE STRANGER [*looks at his watch*] It will soon be time for me to go on board again. [*Advances a step*] Well, well, Ellida — now I have done what I had to do. [*Still nearer*] I have kept the word I gave you.

ELLIDA [*imploringly, shrinking away*] Oh, do not touch me!

THE STRANGER. I give you till to-morrow night to think it over —

WANGEL. There is nothing to think over. Leave this place at once!

THE STRANGER [*still to Ellida*] I am going up the fiord in the steamer now; to-morrow night I shall return, and then I will see you again. You must wait for me here in the garden; for I prefer to settle the matter with you alone, you understand.

ELLIDA [*softly and trembling*] Oh, do you hear that, Wangel?

WANGEL. Do not be alarmed. We shall find means to prevent this visit.

THE STRANGER. Good-by for the present, Ellida. To-morrow night then.

ELLIDA [*in a tone of entreaty*] Oh, no, no, — do not come to-morrow night! Never come again!

THE STRANGER. And if by that time you should be of a mind to come with me over the sea —

ELLIDA. Oh, do not look at me like that —

THE STRANGER. I only mean that in that case you must be ready to start.

WANGEL. Go into the house, Ellida.

ELLIDA. I cannot. Oh, help me! Save me, Wangel!

THE STRANGER. For you must remember this, that if you do not come with me to-morrow, it will all be over.

ELLIDA [*looks at him, trembling*] Will it all be over? For ever —?

THE STRANGER [*with a nod*] Beyond recall, Ellida! I shall never return to this country; you will never see me any more, nor hear from me either. I shall be as though dead and gone from you, for evermore.

ELLIDA [*breathes uneasily*] Oh —!

THE STRANGER. So think carefully what you do. Good-by. [*He climbs over the fence, stops and says*] Well, Ellida, — be ready to start to-morrow night; for then I will come and take you away. [*He goes slowly and calmly along the footpath and out to the right.*]

ELLIDA [*looks after him a while*] Of my own free will, he said! Think of that — he said that I should go with him of my own free will.

WANGEL. Be calm, be calm. He is gone now, and you shall never see him again.

ELLIDA. Oh, how can you say that? He is coming again to-morrow night.

WANGEL. Let him come; I will see that he does not meet you.

ELLIDA [*shakes her head*] Oh, Wangel, do not think that you can prevent him.

WANGEL. Yes, I can, dearest — rely upon me.

ELLIDA [*musing, without listening to him*] When he has been here — to-morrow night —? And when he has gone away in the steamer, over the sea —?

WANGEL. Well, what then?

ELLIDA. I wonder whether he will never — never come again?

WANGEL. No, dear Ellida, you may feel absolutely secure on that point. What could he do here after this? He has heard now, from your own lips, that you will have nothing to do with him. That ends the whole thing.

ELLIDA [*to herself*] To-morrow then — or never.

WANGEL. And even if he should take it into his head to come again —

ELLIDA [*eagerly*] What then —?

WANGEL. Why, we know how to make him harmless.

ELLIDA. Oh, do not think that.

WANGEL. We know what to do, I say! If nothing else will make him leave you in peace, then he shall answer for the murder of the captain.

ELLIDA [*vehemently*] No, no, no —! Never that! We know nothing about the murder of the captain! Absolutely nothing!

WANGEL. We know nothing! Why, he himself confessed it to you!

ELLIDA. No, nothing about that! If you say anything, I will deny it. He shall not be caged! His place is out on the open sea. That is his home.

WANGEL [*looks at her and says slowly*] Ah, Ellida — Ellida!

ELLIDA [*clings to him passionately*] Oh, dear one, faithful one — save me from that man!

WANGEL [*gently disengaging himself*] Come! Come with me!

[*Lyngstrand and Hilda, both with fishing-tackle, appear from the right beside the pond.*]

LYNGSTRAND [*goes rapidly towards Ellida*] Oh, what do you think, Mrs. Wangel — I have something wonderful to tell you!

WANGEL. What is it?

LYNGSTRAND. Just fancy — we have seen the American!

WANGEL. The American?

HILDA. Yes, I saw him too.

LYNGSTRAND. He went round by the back of the garden, and then on board the big English steamer.

WANGEL. Where have you known that man?

LYNGSTRAND. I was at sea with him once. I was quite sure he was drowned; and here he appears as large as life.

WANGEL. Do you know anything more about him?

LYNGSTRAND. No; but I'm sure he has come back to be revenged on his faithless wife.

WANGEL. What do you mean?

HILDA. Mr. Lyngstrand is going to make a statue of him.

WANGEL. I don't understand a word —

ELLIDA. You shall hear all about it by-and-by.

[*Arnholm and Boletta enter from the left along the foot-path outside the garden fence.*]

BOLETTA [*to those in the garden*] Come and look! The English steamer is going up the fiord. [*A large steamer glides slowly past at some distance.*]

LYNGSTRAND [*to Hilda, near the garden fence*] I am sure he will come down upon her to-night.

HILDA [*nods*] Upon his faithless wife — yes.

LYNGSTRAND. Fancy, — just at midnight.

HILDA. I think it will be thrilling.

ELLIDA [*looking after the ship*] To-morrow then —

WANGEL. And after that, never again.

ELLIDA [*softly and trembling*] Oh, Wangel — save me from myself.

WANGEL [*looks anxiously at her*] Ellida! I feel it — there is something behind all this.

ELLIDA. All that allures is behind it.

WANGEL. All that allures —?

ELLIDA. That man is like the sea. [*She goes slowly and in deep thought through the garden out to the left. Wangel walks uneasily by her side, observing her intently.*]

CURTAIN

ACT FOUR.

Garden-room at Doctor Wangel's. Doors right and left. In the back, between the two windows, an open glass door leading out to the veranda. A portion of the garden is seen below. A sofa and table in front on the left. To the right a piano, and farther back a large flower-stand. In the middle of the floor a round table with chairs about it. On the table, a rose-bush in bloom, and other plants in pots about the room. It is forenoon.

Boletta is seated on the sofa by the table, left, working at a piece of embroidery. Lyngstrand sits on a chair at the upper end of the table. Ballested is seated in the garden, painting. Hilda stands beside him, looking on.

LYNGSTRAND [*sits silent awhile with his arms on the table, watching Boletta at work*] It must be very difficult to sew edging like that, Miss Wangel.

BOLETTA. Oh no, it's not so difficult, if only you are careful to count right —

LYNGSTRAND. Count? Have you to count?

BOLETTA. Yes, the stitches. Look here.

LYNGSTRAND. Why, so you must! Fancy! It's almost a kind of art. Can you draw too?

BOLETTA. Oh yes, when I have a copy before me.

LYNGSTRAND. Not unless?

BOLETTA. No, not unless.

LYNGSTRAND. Then it's not really art after all.

BOLETTA. No, it's more of a — a knack.

LYNGSTRAND. But I should think, now, that you could probably learn art?

BOLETTA. Even though I have no turn for it?

LYNGSTRAND. Yes, in spite of that — if you could be always with a real born artist —

BOLETTA. Do you think I could learn from him?

LYNGSTRAND. I don't mean "learn" in the ordinary sense. But I think it would come to you by degrees — by a sort of miracle, Miss Wangel.

BOLETTA. That is a strange idea.

LYNGSTRAND [*after a pause*] Have you thought much — I mean — have you thought at all deeply and seriously about marriage, Miss Wangel?

BOLETTA [*glances at him*] About —? No.

LYNGSTRAND. I have.

BOLETTA. Indeed; have you?

LYNGSTRAND. Yes. I very often think about things of that sort; and particularly about marriage. And then I have read a good deal on the subject too. I think marriage may be counted a sort of miracle; the woman is transformed, as it were, by degrees and comes to resemble her husband.

BOLETTA. Acquires his interests, you mean?

LYNGSTRAND. Yes, that's just it!

BOLETTA. Well, but what about his abilities? — his talent and skill?

LYNGSTRAND. H'm — well — I wonder whether they, too, wouldn't —

BOLETTA. Then do you think that what a man has mastered by reading — or by his own thought — can be passed on in this way to his wife?

LYNGSTRAND. Yes, that too; by degrees; as if by a miracle. But of course I know that this could only happen in a marriage that is faithful, and loving, and really happy.

BOLETTA. Has it never occurred to you that perhaps a husband might be absorbed in the same way into his wife? Might come to resemble her, I mean.

LYNGSTRAND. A husband? No, I have never thought of that.

BOLETTA. But why not the one as well as the other?

LYNGSTRAND. No; a man has his vocation to live for, you know. And that is what makes a man so strong and resolute, Miss Wangel. He has his life-work.

BOLETTA. Every man?

LYNGSTRAND. Oh no. I was thinking mainly of artists.

BOLETTA. Do you think it right for an artist to marry?

LYNGSTRAND. Most certainly; if he can find some one he really loves —

BOLETTA. Even then it seems to me that he should rather live for his art alone.

LYNGSTRAND. Of course he must; but he can quite well do that even if he marries.

BOLETTA. But what about her, then?

LYNGSTRAND. Her? Who — ?

BOLETTA. The woman he marries. What is she to live for?

LYNGSTRAND. She too must live for his art. I should think that must be such happiness for a woman.

BOLETTA. H'm, — I'm not so sure —

LYNGSTRAND. Oh yes, Miss Wangel, believe me. It is not only all the honor and glory she enjoys through him; that, I should say, is almost the least part of it. But that she can help him to create, — that she can lighten his labor by being ever at his side, and tending him, and making life thoroughly comfortable for him. It seems to me that must be such a delight for a woman.

BOLETTA. Oh, you don't realize how selfish you are!

LYNGSTRAND. Am *I* selfish? Good heavens —! Oh, if you only knew me a little better — [*Bends forward towards her*] Miss Wangel, — when I am gone, — and I shall be soon —

BOLETTA [*looks at him sympathetically*] Oh, don't get such melancholy thoughts into your head.

LYNGSTRAND. I don't see that it is so very melancholy.

BOLETTA. How do you mean?

LYNGSTRAND. I shall be starting in about a month, first for home, and soon afterwards for the South.

BOLETTA. Oh, I see. Yes, yes.

LYNGSTRAND. Will you think of me now and then, Miss Wangel?

BOLETTA. Yes, gladly.

LYNGSTRAND [*joyfully*] Oh, do you promise me that?

BOLETTA. Yes, I promise.

LYNGSTRAND. Solemnly, Miss Boletta?

BOLETTA. Solemnly. [*Changing her tone*] Oh, but what is the use of all this? Nothing can ever come of it.

LYNGSTRAND. How can you say that? It would be such a joy to me to know that you were at home here thinking of me.

BOLETTA. Yes, but what more?

LYNGSTRAND. Well, I am not quite certain about anything more —

BOLETTA. Nor I. So many things stand in the way; every possible thing stands in the way, it seems to me.

LYNGSTRAND. Oh, some miracle or other might happen. A happy turn of fate — or something of that sort. For I am convinced that fortune is on my side.

BOLETTA [*with animation*] Yes, that is right! Surely you think so!

LYNGSTRAND. Yes, I am perfectly convinced of it. And then — in a few years — when I come home again a famous sculptor, with plenty of money, and as well as possible —

BOLETTA. Yes, yes; let us hope you will.

LYNGSTRAND. You may be quite sure of it — if only you think faithfully and warmly of me while I am away in the South. And that you have promised to do.

BOLETTA. Yes, I have. [*Shakes her head*] But nothing will ever come of this, all the same.

LYNGSTRAND. Yes, Miss Boletta, this at least will come of it, that I shall make the easier and quicker progress with my group.

BOLETTA. Do you think so?

LYNGSTRAND. Yes, I feel it within me. And I think it will be stimulating for you too, — here in this out-of-the-way place — to know that you are, as it were, helping me to create.

BOLETTA [*looks at him*] Well — but you, on your side?

LYNGSTRAND. I — ?

BOLETTA [*looks out towards the garden*] Hush! Let us talk of something else; here comes Mr. Arnholm. [*Arnholm is seen in the garden, on the left. He stops and speaks to Ballested and Hilda.*]

LYNGSTRAND. Are you fond of your old teacher, Miss Boletta?

BOLETTA. Am I fond of him?

LYNGSTRAND. Yes, I mean do you like him?

BOLETTA. Oh yes, I do indeed; he is such a good friend and adviser. And he is always so ready to help you whenever he can.

LYNGSTRAND. Is it not strange that he has never married?

BOLETTA. Do you think it so strange?

LYNGSTRAND. Yes; they say he is well off.

BOLETTA. I suppose he is. But it may not have been very easy for him to find any one who would have him.

LYNGSTRAND. Why?

BOLETTA. Oh, he has been the teacher of nearly every girl he knows. He says so himself.

LYNGSTRAND. But what does that matter?

BOLETTA. Why, of course, one doesn't marry a man who has been one's teacher!

LYNGSTRAND. Don't you think a girl could possibly love her teacher?

BOLETTA. Not after she is quite grown up.

LYNGSTRAND. Dear me! How odd!

BOLETTA [*warningly*] Hush, hush!

[*Ballested, who has meanwhile collected his things, carries them out through the garden to the right. Hilda helps him. Arnholm comes up into the veranda and enters the room.*]

ARNHOLM. Good morning, my dear Boletta. Good morning, Mr. — Mr. — h'm! [*He looks annoyed, and nods coldly to Lyngstrand, who rises and bows.*]

BOLETTA [*rises and goes to Arnholm*] Good morning, Mr. Arnholm.

ARNHOLM. How are you all here to-day?

BOLETTA. Thanks, very well.

ARNHOLM. Has your step-mother gone to bathe to-day again?

BOLETTA. No, she is up in her room.

ARNHOLM. Not quite well?

BOLETTA. I don't know. She has locked herself in.

ARNHOLM. H'm — has she?

LYNGSTRAND. Mrs. Wangel seemed very much upset about that American yesterday.

ARNHOLM. What do you know about it?

LYNGSTRAND. I told Mrs. Wangel that I had seen him in the flesh, going round behind the garden.

ARNHOLM. Oh indeed.

BOLETTA [*to Arnholm*] You and father sat up late last night, did you not?

ARNHOLM. Yes, pretty late. We had an important question to discuss.

BOLETTA. Did you get in a word with him about me and my affairs?

ARNHOLM. No, my dear Boletta. I could not manage it; he was so absorbed in something else.

BOLETTA [*sighs*] Ah, yes, — he always is.

ARNHOLM [*looking significantly at her*] But remember, you and I are to have another talk about these things, presently.— Where is your father now? Has he gone out?

BOLETTA. I think he must be down at the surgery. I'll go and fetch him.

ARNHOLM. No, thank you, don't do that. I would rather go down to him.

BOLETTA [*listening to the left*] Wait a moment, Mr. Arnholm. I think I hear father coming downstairs. Yes. He must have been up attending to her.

[*Doctor Wangel enters by the door on the left.*]

WANGEL [*holds out his hand to Arnholm*] Ah, my dear friend, are you here already? It's good of you to come so early; there are still several things I want to discuss with you.

BOLETTA [*to Lyngstrand*] Shall we join Hilda in the garden for a little while?

LYNGSTRAND. With all the pleasure in life, Miss Wangel. [*He and Boletta go down into the garden, and out among the trees in the background.*]

ARNHOLM [*who has been following them with his eyes,*

turns to Wangel] Do you know much about that young man?

WANGEL. No, very little.

ARNHOLM. Then do you like him to be so much with the girls?

WANGEL. Is he much with them? I really hadn't noticed it.

ARNHOLM. Don't you think you ought to keep an eye on that sort of thing?

WANGEL. Yes, no doubt you are right. But, bless my soul, what is a poor fellow to do? The girls have got so accustomed to look after themselves; they will not listen to a word, either from me or from Ellida.

ARNHOLM. Not even from her?

WANGEL. No. And besides, I cannot expect her to interfere in such matters; it is not at all in her way. [*Breaking off*] But that was not what we were going to talk about. Tell me — have you given any more thought to it? — to all that I told you last night?

ARNHOLM. I have thought of nothing else, ever since we parted.

WANGEL. And what do you think I ought to do in the matter?

ARNHOLM. My dear Doctor, I think that you, as a physician, ought to know better than I.

WANGEL. Oh, if you only knew how difficult it is for a physician to form a valid judgment in the case of a patient he loves so dearly! And this is no common disorder either — no case for an ordinary physician, or for ordinary remedies.

ARNHOLM. How is she to-day?

WANGEL. I have just been up to see her, and she appeared to me quite calm. But behind all her moods something seems to be hidden that eludes me entirely. And then she is so variable — so incalculable — so subject to sudden changes.

ARNHOLM. No doubt that is due to her morbid state of mind.

WANGEL. Not entirely. The germ of it all is innate in her. Ellida belongs to the sea-folk; that is the trouble.

ARNHOLM. What do you mean precisely, my dear Doctor?

WANGEL. Have you not noticed that the people who live out by the open sea are like a race apart? They seem almost to live the life of the sea itself. There is the surge of the sea — and its ebb and flow too — both in their thoughts and in their feelings. And they never bear transplantation. No, I should have thought of that before. It was a positive sin against Ellida to take her away from the sea and bring her in here!

ARNHOLM. Have you come to look at it in that light?

WANGEL. Yes, more and more; but I ought to have known it from the first. Oh, I did really know it then too, but I would not acknowledge it to myself. I loved her so much, you see! And consequently I thought first of myself. In fact, I was utterly and unpardonably selfish.

ARNHOLM. H'm, — I am afraid every man is a trifle selfish under those circumstances. But I can't say that I have noticed that vice in you, Doctor Wangel.

WANGEL [*wandering uneasily up and down*] Oh yes! And I have been so since, as well. I am so much, much older than she; I ought to have been to her like a father and a guide in one. I ought to have done my best to develop and clarify her intelligence. But unfortunately I have done nothing of the sort. I have not had energy enough, you see! And in fact I preferred to have her just as she was. But then she grew worse and worse, and I was at my wits' end to know what to do. [*Lower*] That is why I turned to you in my perplexity, and asked you to come to us.

ARNHOLM [*looks at him in astonishment*] What! Was that why you wrote to me?

WANGEL. Yes; but don't say anything about it.

ARNHOLM. My dear Doctor, — what in the world — what good did you suppose *I* could do? I don't understand.

WANGEL. No, of course you do not; I had got upon a wrong scent. I fancied that Ellida had once cared for you, and that she still had a secret leaning in your direction. So

I thought it might perhaps do her good to see you again, and have a talk with you about home and old times.

ARNHOLM. Then it was your wife you meant when you wrote that some one here was waiting and — and perhaps longing for me!

WANGEL. Yes; who else?

ARNHOLM [*quickly*] Of course, of course. — But I did not understand you.

WANGEL. Naturally not, as I said before. I was on an entirely wrong scent.

ARNHOLM. And you call yourself selfish!

WANGEL. Oh, I had such a great error to atone for. I felt I had no right to reject any expedient that could possibly ease her mind a little.

ARNHOLM. What do you take to be the real explanation of the power this stranger exercises over her?

WANGEL. H'm, my dear friend — there may be sides to that question that don't admit of explanation.

ARNHOLM. Something inexplicable in itself, do you mean? Entirely inexplicable?

WANGEL. Inexplicable for the present, at any rate.

ARNHOLM. Do you believe in such things?

WANGEL. I neither believe nor disbelieve. I simply do not know. So I suspend my judgment.

ARNHOLM. But tell me one thing: that strange, uncanny idea of hers about the child's eyes —

WANGEL [*eagerly*] I don't in the least believe that about the eyes! I will not believe any such thing! It must be pure imagination on her part; nothing else.

ARNHOLM. Did you notice the man's eyes when you saw him yesterday?

WANGEL. Yes, certainly I did.

ARNHOLM. And you found no sort of likeness?

WANGEL [*evasively*] H'm — upon my soul I don't know what to say. It was not quite light when I saw him; and besides, Ellida had talked so much about this likeness beforehand — I don't think it was possible for me to observe him without any bias.

ARNHOLM. No, no; very likely not. But then the other point: that all this dread and unrest came upon her just at the very time when this stranger would seem to have been on his way home?

WANGEL. Well, you see — that again is a belief she must have imagined and dreamt herself into, since the day before yesterday. It did not come upon her at all so suddenly — so instantaneously — as she now maintains. But since she heard from this young Lyngstrand that Johnston or Friman — or whatever he is called — was on his way home three years ago — in March — she has evidently persuaded herself that her mental trouble came on in the very same month.

ARNHOLM. And did it not?

WANGEL. Not at all. There had been unmistakable symptoms of it long before that. — It is true she happened — by chance — to have a rather severe attack precisely in the month of March, three years ago —

ARNHOLM. Well, then — !

WANGEL. Oh, but that is quite easily accounted for by the circumstances — the condition — she happened to be in at that time.

ARNHOLM. The indications may be read in either way, then.

WANGEL [*wringing his hands*] And to be powerless to help her! To be at the end of one's resources! To see no sort of remedy —

ARNHOLM. What if you made up your mind to a change of residence — to move to some other place, where she might live under conditions that seemed to her more home-like?

WANGEL. My dear fellow, do you think I haven't suggested that to her? I proposed that we should move out to Skioldvik. But she will not.

ARNHOLM. Not that either?

WANGEL. No. She thinks it would be useless; and I dare say she is right too.

ARNHOLM. H'm — do you think so?

WANGEL. Yes; and besides — on considering the matter

more closely — I really don't see how I could manage it. I scarcely think I should be justified, on the girls' account, in moving to such an out-of-the-way corner. After all, they must live where there is at least some chance of their one day being able to marry.

ARNHOLM. To marry? Have you that so much on your mind already?

WANGEL. Why, yes, of course; I must think of that too! But then — on the other hand — the thought of my poor suffering Ellida! Oh, my dear Arnholm — wherever I turn, I seem to stand between fire and water!

ARNHOLM. There may, perhaps, be no need for you to trouble about Boletta — [*Breaking off*] I wonder where she — where they have gone?

[*He goes up to the open door and looks out.*]

WANGEL [*beside the piano*] Oh, I should be so glad to make any possible sacrifice — for all three of them. — If only I knew what!

[*Ellida enters by the door on the left.*]

ELLIDA [*rapidly to Wangel*] Be sure you do not go out this morning.

WANGEL. No, no, certainly not; I will stay at home with you. [*Points to Arnholm, who approaches*] But you haven't said good morning to our friend?

ELLIDA [*turns*] Oh, are you there, Mr. Arnholm? [*Holds out her hand*] Good morning.

ARNHOLM. Good morning, Mrs. Wangel. You have not gone for your bath to-day as usual?

ELLIDA. No, no, no! I couldn't think of it to-day. Won't you sit down for a moment?

ARNHOLM. No, thank you — not just now. [*Looks at Wangel*] I promised the girls I would join them in the garden.

ELLIDA. Heavens knows whether you'll find them in the garden. I never know where they may have got to.

WANGEL. Oh yes, they are probably down by the pond.

ARNHOLM. I dare say I shall find them.

[*He nods and passes across the veranda into the garden, and out to the right.*]

ELLIDA. What o'clock is it, Wangel?

WANGEL [*looks at his watch*] It's a little past eleven.

ELLIDA. A little past; and at eleven or half-past to-night the steamer will be here. Oh, if it only were over!

WANGEL [*goes closer to her*] Dear Ellida, there is one thing I should like to ask you about.

ELLIDA. What is it?

WANGEL. The night before last — up at the Prospect — you said that during the past three years you had often seen him bodily before you.

ELLIDA. So I have. I assure you I have.

WANGEL. Well, but how did you see him?

ELLIDA. How did I see him?

WANGEL. I mean — what did he look like when you appeared to see him before you?

ELLIDA. Why, my dear Wangel, — you know yourself now what he looks like.

WANGEL. And he looked like that when you seemed to see him?

ELLIDA. Yes, he did.

WANGEL. Exactly as you saw him in reality last evening?

ELLIDA. Yes, exactly.

WANGEL. Then how did it happen that you did not at once recognize him?

ELLIDA [*starts*] Did I not?

WANGEL. No. You yourself told me afterwards that at first you did not in the least know who the stranger was.

ELLIDA [*impressed*] Yes, I really believe you are right! Was not that strange, Wangel? Think of my not knowing him at once!

WANGEL. It was only by his eyes, you said —

ELLIDA. Oh yes — his eyes! His eyes!

WANGEL. Well, but up at the Prospect you said that he had always appeared to you just as he was when you parted, ten years ago.

ELLIDA. Did I say that?

WANGEL. Yes.

ELLIDA. Then he must have looked at that time much as he does now.

WANGEL. No. You gave quite another description of him on the way home, the night before last. Ten years ago he had no beard, you said. He was quite differently dressed too. And the breast-pin with the pearl in it — ? He wore nothing of the sort yesterday.

ELLIDA. No, he didn't.

WANGEL [*looks intently at her*] Now think a little, dear Ellida. Perhaps you cannot remember now what he looked like when you parted from him at Bratthammer?

ELLIDA [*reflectively, closing her eyes for a moment*] Not quite distinctly. No — I can't at all to-day. Isn't that strange?

WANGEL. Not so very strange. A new and real figure has presented itself to you, and that obscures the old one — so that you can no longer see it.

ELLIDA. Do you think so, Wangel?

WANGEL. Yes; and it obscures your morbid illusions too; so it is a good thing the reality has shown itself.

ELLIDA. Good! Do you call it a good thing?

WANGEL. Yes; its coming — may be your salvation.

ELLIDA [*seats herself on the sofa*] Wangel — come here and sit by me. I must tell you all my thoughts.

WANGEL. Yes, do, dear Ellida.

[*He seats himself on a chair at the other side of the table.*

ELLIDA. It was really a great misfortune — for both of us — that we two, of all people, should come together.

WANGEL [*starts*] What do you say?

ELLIDA. Oh yes, it was — and it could not but be. It could lead to nothing but unhappiness — especially considering the way we came together.

WANGEL. Why, what was wrong with the way — ?

ELLIDA. Listen now, Wangel, — it is useless for us to go on any longer lying to ourselves — and to each other.

WANGEL. Are we doing so? Lying, do you say?

ELLIDA. Yes, lying. Or at any rate — concealing the truth. The truth — the sheer unvarnished truth is this: you came out there and — bought me.

WANGEL. Bought — Did you say — bought?

ELLIDA. Oh, I was not a bit better than you. I joined in the bargain. I went and sold myself to you.

WANGEL [*looks at her, deeply pained*] Ellida, — have you the heart to say so?

ELLIDA. Why, what else can you call it? You could not bear the void in your house; you looked about for a new wife —

WANGEL. And for a new mother for the children, Ellida.

ELLIDA. That too, perhaps — incidentally, as it were. Although — you did not in the least know whether I was fit to be a mother to them. You had only seen me and spoken with me once or twice. But you took a fancy to me, and so —

WANGEL. Well, you may give it what name you please.

ELLIDA. And I, for my part — There was I, helpless and forlorn, and utterly alone. What more natural than that I should accept the bargain — when you came and offered to maintain me all my life.

WANGEL. I assure you I did not think of it in that light, my dear Ellida. I asked you honestly if you would share with me and the children the little I could call my own.

ELLIDA. Yes, you did. But, little or much, I ought not to have accepted! I should never have accepted at any price! I should never have sold myself! Better the meanest labor — better the deepest poverty — of my own free will — by my own choice!

WANGEL [*rising*] Then have the five or six years we have lived together been utterly wasted for you?

ELLIDA. Oh, you must not think that, Wangel! I have had all from you that any one could possibly desire. But I did not come into your home of my own free will, — that is the thing.

WANGEL [*looks at her*] Not of your free will?

ELLIDA. No; it was not of my own free will that I cast in my lot with yours.

WANGEL [*softly*] Ah, I remember — the phrase he used yesterday.

ELLIDA. The whole secret lies in that phrase. It has thrown a new light on things for me; so that I see it all now.

WANGEL. What do you see?

ELLIDA. I see that the life we two lead with each other — is really no marriage at all.

WANGEL [*bitterly*] There you are right. The life we now lead is no marriage at all.

ELLIDA. Nor the life we led before; never; not from the outset. [*Looks straight before her*] The first — that might have been a real and true marriage.

WANGEL. The first? What "first" do you mean?

ELLIDA. Mine, — with him.

WANGEL [*looks at her in astonishment*] I cannot understand you at all!

ELLIDA. Oh, my dear Wangel, — do not let us lie to each other; nor to ourselves.

WANGEL. No, of course not! But what then?

ELLIDA. Why, don't you see — we can never get away from this — that a voluntary promise is to the full as binding as a marriage.

WANGEL. Why, what in the world — !

ELLIDA [*rises impetuously*] Let me leave you, Wangel!

WANGEL. Ellida — ! Ellida — !

ELLIDA. Yes, yes — you must let me! I can assure you there will be nothing else for it in the end — after the way we two came together.

WANGEL [*controlling his emotion*] So it has come to this!

ELLIDA. It had to come to this; no other end was possible.

WANGEL [*looks sorrowfully at her*] So even in our daily life together I have not won you. You have never, never been wholly mine.

ELLIDA. Oh, Wangel — if only I could love you as I gladly would! As tenderly as you deserve! But I feel quite clearly — it will never be.

WANGEL. A divorce then? It is a divorce, — a formal, legal divorce, — that you want?

ELLIDA. My dear, you do not understand me at all. It is not the forms that I care about. These external things seem to me to matter nothing. What I wish is that we two should agree, of our own free will, to release each other.

WANGEL [*bitterly, nods slowly*] To cancel the bargain, — yes.

ELLIDA [*eagerly*] Precisely! To cancel the bargain.

WANGEL. And after that, Ellida? Afterwards? Have you thought of the outlook for both of us? What shape will our lives take — both yours and mine?

ELLIDA. We must not let that influence us. The future must shape itself as best it can. This that I am begging of you, Wangel, — this is the chief thing! Set me free! Give me back my full freedom.

WANGEL. Ellida — this is a terrible demand you make upon me. Let me at least have time to collect myself and come to a resolve. Let us discuss the matter more thoroughly. And do you, too, give yourself time to reflect what you are doing!

ELLIDA. But there is no time to waste on all that. You must give me back my freedom this very day.

WANGEL. Why to-day?

ELLIDA. Because it is to-night that he is coming.

WANGEL [*starts*] Coming! He! What has the stranger to do with this?

ELLIDA. I want to meet him in full freedom.

WANGEL. And what — what do you intend to do then?

ELLIDA. I do not want to take refuge in the plea that I am another man's wife — or that I have no choice left me. For then my decision would decide nothing.

WANGEL. You talk of choice! Choice, Ellida! Choice in this matter!

ELLIDA. Yes, choose I must — freely choose either course. I must be free to let him go away alone — or — to go with him.

WANGEL. Do you understand what you are saying? Go with him! Place your whole fate in his hands!

ELLIDA. Did I not place my whole fate in your hands? And that — without thinking twice.

WANGEL. That may be. But he! He! A total stranger! A man you know so little about!

ELLIDA. I knew perhaps even less of you; and yet I went with you.

WANGEL. At least you knew pretty well what kind of life you were entering upon. But now? Now? Reflect! What do you know now? Nothing whatever: not even who he is — or what he is.

ELLIDA [*looking straight before her*] That is true. But that is just the terrible thing.

WANGEL. Yes, terrible indeed —

ELLIDA. And that is why I feel as if I must give way to it.

WANGEL [*looks at her*] Because it seems to you terrible?

ELLIDA. Yes, just because of that.

WANGEL [*nearer*] Tell me, Ellida — what do you really mean by "terrible"?

ELLIDA [*reflects*] I call a thing terrible — when it both frightens and fascinates me.

WANGEL. Fascinates?

ELLIDA. Most of all when it fascinates me — I think.

WANGEL [*slowly*] You are akin to the sea.

ELLIDA. There is terror in that too.

WANGEL. And in yourself no less. You both frighten and fascinate.[1]

ELLIDA. Do you think so, Wangel?

[1] For another rendering of the foregoing very difficult passage —especially difficult because of the frequent occurrence of "det grufulde" "the terrible" in other contexts—the reader who is curious in such matters may consult the five-volume edition of Ibsen's *Prose Dramas* (vol. v. p. 210), where he will find it discussed in a footnote.

ELLIDA [*tears herself away*] — and that I feel as though my place were with him.

WANGEL [*bows his head*] I begin to understand.

ELLIDA. And what help, what remedy have you to offer me?

WANGEL [*looks sorrowfully at her*] To-morrow — he will be gone. Then you will be safe from disaster; and then I promise to release you and let you go. We will cancel the bargain, Ellida.

ELLIDA. Oh, Wangel — ! To-morrow — it will be too late — !

WANGEL [*looks out towards the garden*] The children! The children — ! Let us at least spare them — for the present.

[*Arnholm, Boletta, Hilda, and Lyngstrand appear in the garden. Lyngstrand takes leave without entering the house, and goes out to the left. The others come into the room.*]

ARNHOLM. Ah, I can tell you we have been laying great plans —

HILDA. We want to go out on the fiord this evening, and —

BOLETTA. No, no, don't tell!

WANGEL. We two have also been laying plans.

ARNHOLM. Ah — really?

WANGEL. To-morrow Ellida is going to Skioldvik— for a time.

BOLETTA. Going away — ?

ARNHOLM. That is very wise, Mrs. Wangel.

WANGEL. Ellida wants to go home again; home to the sea.

HILDA [*with a little rush towards Ellida*] Are you going away? Going away from us!

ELLIDA [*startled*] Why, Hilda! What is the matter with you?

HILDA [*restraining herself*] Oh, nothing at all. [*In a low tone, turning from her*] Go by all means!

BOLETTA [*anxiously*] Father, I can see — you are going away too — to Skioldvik!

WANGEL. No, certainly not! I shall perhaps run out now and then —

BOLETTA. And home again — ?

WANGEL. Yes, home —

BOLETTA. — now and then, I suppose!

WANGEL. My dear child, it must be so. [*He walks away.*]

ARNHOLM [*whispers*] I have something to say to you by-and-by, Boletta. [*He goes over to Wangel. They converse in a low tone by the door.*]

ELLIDA [*softly to Boletta*] What was the matter with Hilda? She seemed quite beside herself!

BOLETTA. Have you never seen what Hilda has been thirsting for, day after day?

ELLIDA. Thirsting for?

BOLETTA. Ever since you came into the house!

ELLIDA. No, no, — what is it?

BOLETTA. One word of affection from you.

ELLIDA. Ah —! What if there were work for me to do here!

[*She clasps her hands above her head and looks immovably before her, as if a prey to conflicting thoughts and moods.*]

[*Wangel and Arnholm come forward conversing in whispers.*]

[*Boletta goes and looks into the side room on the right. Then she throws the door wide open.*]

BOLETTA. Well, father dear — dinner is on the table, —

WANGEL [*with forced composure*] Is it, child? That's right. Come along, Arnholm! We will drink a parting cup with — with "the lady from the sea." [*They go towards the door on the right.*]

CURTAIN

ACT FIVE.

The remote corner of Doctor Wangel's garden, by the carp-pond. Deepening summer twilight.

Arnholm, Boletta, Lyngstrand, and Hilda, in a boat on the fiord, are punting along the shore from the left.

HILDA. Look, we can easily jump ashore here!

ARNHOLM. No, no, don't do it!

LYNGSTRAND. I can't jump, Miss Hilda.

HILDA. Can't you jump either, Mr. Arnholm?

ARNHOLM. I would rather not.

BOLETTA. Let us land at the bathing-house steps. [*They punt the boat out to the right.*]

[*At that moment Ballested appears from the right, on the footpath, carrying music and a French horn. He greets those in the boat, turns, and talks to them. Their answers are heard farther and farther off.*]

BALLESTED. What do you say? — Yes of course it's in honor of the English steamer. It's her last trip this year. But if you want to enjoy the music you mustn't put off too long. [*Calls out*] What? [*Shakes his head*] Can't hear what you say!

[*Ellida, with a shawl over her head, comes in from the left, followed by Doctor Wangel.*]

WANGEL. But, my dear Ellida, I assure you there is ample time.

ELLIDA. No, no, — there is not! He may come at any moment.

BALLESTED [*outside, by the garden fence*] Ah, good evening, Doctor! Good evening, Mrs. Wangel!

WANGEL [*notices him*] Oh, are you there? Is there to be music to-night again?

BALLESTED. Yes. The Musical Society proposes to show what it can do. There's no lack of festive occasions at this season. To-night it's in honor of the Englishman.

ELLIDA. The English steamer! Is it in sight already?

BALLESTED. Not yet; but you see it comes down the fiord among the islands. It is on you before you know where you are.

ELLIDA. Yes, — that is true.

WANGEL [*partly to Ellida*] This is the last trip. After to-night we shall see no more of it.

BALLESTED. A melancholy thought, Doctor. But that's why we are turning out in its honor, as I said before. Ah yes, ah yes! The happy summer-time is drawing to a close. "Soon will all the straits be ice-bound," as they say in the tragedy.[1]

ELLIDA. All the straits ice-bound, — yes.

BALLESTED. Mournful reflection! For weeks and months now we have been joyful children of the summer; it is hard to reconcile oneself to the dark days. At first, that is to say; for people can alcli — ac — climatize themselves, Mrs. Wangel. Yes they can indeed. [*He bows and goes out to the left.*]

ELLIDA [*Looks out across the fiord*] Oh, this torturing suspense! This intolerable last half-hour before the decision!

WANGEL. Then you are still bent on speaking with him yourself?

ELLIDA. I must speak with him myself; for I must make my choice of my own free will.

WANGEL. You have no choice, Ellida. You cannot be allowed to choose — *I* will not allow you.

ELLIDA. You can never prevent my choosing; neither you nor any one else. You can forbid me to go away with him — to cast in my lot with him — if I should choose that. You can forcibly detain me here, against my will. That you can do. But the choice in my innermost soul — my choice of him and not of you, — in case I should and must choose so, — that you cannot prevent.

WANGEL. No, you are right; I cannot prevent that.

ELLIDA. And then I have nothing to help me to resist! At home here there is nothing whatever to attach and bind me. I am utterly without root in your house, Wangel. The children are not mine — their hearts, I mean. They

[1] "Snart er alle sunde lukket."—Oehlenschläger's *Hakon Jarl.*

have never been mine. — When I go away — if I do go away — either with him to-night or out to Skioldvik to-morrow, — I have not a key to give up, not a direction to leave behind me, about anything in the world. You see how utterly without root I am in your house; how I have stood entirely outside of everything from the very first moment.

WANGEL. You yourself willed it so.

ELLIDA. No, I did not. I had no will one way or the other. I have merely let everything remain as I found it the day I came. It is you — and no one else — who have willed it so.

WANGEL. I meant to do what was best for you.

ELLIDA. Oh yes, Wangel, I know that so well! But now all this must be paid for; it will have its revenge. There is nothing here now that has any binding power over me — nothing to support — nothing to help me. There is no counter-fascination for me in what should have been the dearest treasure of our common life.

WANGEL. I see that well enough, Ellida; and so from to-morrow you shall have your freedom again. Hereafter you shall live your own life.

ELLIDA. You call that my own life! Oh no, my own true life slid into a wrong groove when I joined it to yours. [*Clenches her hands together in fear and agitation*] And now — to-night — in half an hour — the man I have forsaken will be here — the man to whom my faith should have been inviolable, as his has been to me! Now he is coming to offer me — for the last and only time — a chance of beginning life afresh — of living my own real life — the life that once frightens and fascinates me — and that I cannot forgo. Not of my own free will!

WANGEL. That is just why you require your husband — and your physician also — to take the power out of your hands, and to act on your behalf.

ELLIDA. Yes, Wangel, I understand that very well. Oh, there are times, you may be sure, when I feel as though there would be safety and peace in clinging close to you, and trying to defy all the powers that frighten and fascinate me. But I cannot do it. No, no, — I cannot do it!

WANGEL. Come, Ellida — let us walk up and down a little.

ELLIDA. I should like to; but I dare not. You know he said that I was to wait for him here.

WANGEL. Do come. You have plenty of time yet.

ELLIDA. Do you think so?

WANGEL. Ample time, I assure you.

ELLIDA. Let us walk a little then.

[*They go out in front, to the right. At the same moment Arnholm and Boletta appear by the upper bank of the pond.*]

BOLETTA [*catching sight of the retreating figures*] Look there — !

ARNHOLM [*softly*] Hush! Let them go.

BOLETTA. Can you understand what has been passing between them these last few days?

ARNHOLM. Have you noticed anything?

BOLETTA. Have I noticed — ?

ARNHOLM. Anything particular?

BOLETTA. Oh yes; many things. Have you not?

ARNHOLM. Well, I don't quite know —

BOLETTA. Yes, I am sure you have; only you won't admit it.

ARNHOLM. I think it will do your step-mother good to take this little trip.

BOLETTA. Do you?

ARNHOLM. Yes; I fancy it would be a good thing for every one if she were to get away a little now and then.

BOLETTA. If she goes home to Skioldvik to-morrow, she will certainly never come back again.

ARNHOLM. Why, my dear Boletta, what have you got into your head?

BOLETTA. I am perfectly convinced of it. Just you wait! You shall see — she won't return. Not while Hilda and I are at home, at any rate.

ARNHOLM. Hilda too?

BOLETTA. Well, perhaps Hilda might not matter so much. She is hardly more than a child yet; and I believe in her heart she worships Ellida. But with me it is differ-

ent, you see; a stepmother who is not so very much older than oneself —

ARNHOLM. My dear Boletta — you may not have so very long to wait before leaving home.

BOLETTA [*eagerly*] Do you think so? Have you spoken to father about it?

ARNHOLM. Yes, I have done that too.

BOLETTA. Well — what did he say?

ARNHOLM. H'm — your father is so absorbed in other thoughts just now —

BOLETTA. Yes, yes, that is just what I told you.

ARNHOLM. But so much I ascertained from him, that you must not count upon any help from that quarter.

BOLETTA. Not —?

ARNHOLM. He put his position quite clearly before me, and showed that anything of that kind was a sheer impossibility for him.

BOLETTA [*reproachfully*] Then how could you have the heart to stand there and make game of me?

ARNHOLM. Indeed I did not, dear Boletta. It depends entirely upon yourself whether you will leave home or not.

BOLETTA. Depends upon me, you say?

ARNHOLM. Whether you will go out into the world and learn all that your heart desires. Whether you will take part in all that, at home here, you so long for. Whether you will live your life under happier conditions, Boletta. What do you say?

BOLETTA [*clasping her hands*] Oh, how glorious — ! But all this is utterly impossible. If father neither will nor can — There is no one else in the whole world that I can turn to.

ARNHOLM. Could you not let your old — your former tutor come to your aid?

BOLETTA. You, Mr. Arnholm? Would you really —?

ARNHOLM. Stand by you? Yes, with the greatest of pleasure, both in word and deed; that you may rely upon. Do you accept my offer then? Tell me! Do you consent?

BOLETTA. Do I consent! To leave home — to see the world — to learn something really worth knowing — to do everything that has seemed to me most delightful and impossible —?

ARNHOLM. Yes, all this is now within your reach, if only you will.

BOLETTA. And you will help me to this unspeakable happiness. Oh —but tell me — can I accept so great a gift from a stranger?

ARNHOLM. You can quite well accept it from me, Boletta. From me you may accept anything.

BOLETTA [*seizes his hands*] Yes, I really think I may. I don't know how it is, but — [*With an outburst of emotion*] Oh — I could both laugh and cry for joy! — for sheer happiness! Oh — to think that I shall learn what life is, after all; I was beginning to be so afraid that it would slip away from me.

ARNHOLM. You need not be afraid of that, dear Boletta. But now you must tell me quite frankly whether there is anything — any tie that binds you here?

BOLETTA. Any tie? No, none.

ARNHOLM. None at all?

BOLETTA. No, none whatever. That is, — of course father is a tie — in a way. And Hilda too. But —

ARNHOLM. Well — your father you will have to leave sooner or later; and Hilda too will one day take her own path in life; that is only a question of time. But otherwise there is nothing to bind you, Boletta? No engagement of any sort?

BOLETTA. No, nothing of the kind. So far as that is concerned, I can quite well go wherever I please.

ARNHOLM. Well then, if that is the case, my dear Boletta — you shall come away with me.

BOLETTA [*claps her hands*] Oh, great heavens — what a joy to think of.

ARNHOLM. I hope you have full confidence in me?

BOLETTA. Yes, indeed I have.

ARNHOLM. And you can place yourself and your future fully and fearlessly in my hands, Boletta? You feel you can, do you not?

BOLETTA. Oh yes, certainly! Why should I not? Can you doubt it? You, my old tutor — my tutor in the old days, I mean.

ARNHOLM. Not only because of that. I do not lay so

much stress on that side of the matter. But — well — since you are free then, Boletta — since there is no tie that binds you, — I ask you — if you would be willing — willing to unite yourself to me — for life?

BOLETTA [*starts back in fear*] Oh — what are you saying?

ARNHOLM. For your whole life, Boletta. Will you be my wife?

BOLETTA [*half to herself*] No, no, no! This is impossible! Utterly impossible!

ARNHOLM. Is it so utterly impossible for you to —?

BOLETTA. You surely cannot mean what you are saying, Mr. Arnholm? [*Looks at him*] Or — Perhaps — Was this what you had in mind when — when you proposed to do so much for me?

ARNHOLM. No, you must listen to me a little, Boletta. It appears I have taken you quite by surprise.

BOLETTA. Oh, how could such an offer — from you, — how could it fail to — to surprise me?

ARNHOLM. No doubt you are right. You did not know, of course, — you could not know, that it was for your sake I came here just now.

BOLETTA. Did you come here for — for my sake?

ARNHOLM. Yes, I did, Boletta. I got a letter from your father this spring — and in it was a phrase which led me to believe — h'm — that you had kept your former tutor in — in a little more than friendly remembrance.

BOLETTA. How could father say such a thing?

ARNHOLM. It appears that was not what he meant at all. But in the meantime I had accustomed myself to the thought that here was a young girl waiting and longing for me to come again. — No, you mustn't interrupt me, dear Boletta! And, you see, — when a man, like myself, is no longer in the first flush of youth, such a belief — or illusion — makes an exceedingly strong impression. A vivid — a grateful affection for you grew up within me. I felt I must come to you; see you again; tell you that I shared the feelings which I imagined you entertained for me.

BOLETTA. But now, when you know that it was not so! That it was a mistake!

ARNHOLM. That makes no difference, Boletta. Your

image — as it dwells in my heart — will always remain colored and thrown into relief by the feeling that mistake aroused in me. Perhaps you cannot understand this; but so it is.

BOLETTA. I never dreamed that anything of the kind was possible.

ARNHOLM. But now that you see it is —? What do you say, Boletta? Can you not make up your mind to — to be my wife?

BOLETTA. Oh, it seems so utterly impossible, Mr. Arnholm. You, who have been my teacher! I cannot imagine myself standing in any other kind of relation to you.

ARNHOLM. Well, well — if you feel absolutely sure that you cannot — then the relation between us remains unaltered, my dear Boletta.

BOLETTA. How do you mean?

ARNHOLM. Of course I stand to my proposition, none the less. I will take care that you get away from home and see something of the world. I will enable you to learn what you really want to, and live in security and independence. Your more distant future, too, I will provide for, Boletta. In me you will always have a firm, steadfast friend to rely upon. Be sure of that!

BOLETTA. Oh dear — Mr. Arnholm — all this has become quite impossible now.

ARNHOLM. Is this impossible too?

BOLETTA. Yes, surely you can see it is! After what you have said to me — and after the answer I have given you — Oh, you must surely understand that I cannot accept such great favours from you! I can accept nothing in the world from you; never after this!

ARNHOLM. Then would you rather stay at home here and let life slip away from you?

BOLETTA. Oh, it is torture to think of it!

ARNHOLM. Will you renounce all hope of seeing something of the outer world? Renounce your chance of taking part in all that you say you are thirsting for? Can you know that life has such infinite possibilities — and yet be content to realize no single one of them? Think well, Boletta.

BOLETTA. Yes, yes — you are quite right, Mr. Arnholm.

ARNHOLM. And then — when your father is no longer with you — you might find yourself helpless and alone in the world. Or you might have to give yourself to another man — whom you — possibly — might not be able to care for, any more than for me.

BOLETTA. Oh yes, — I see quite well how true it is — all that you say. But still —! — Or perhaps, after all —

ARNHOLM [*quickly*] Well!

BOLETTA [*looks at him, undecided*] Perhaps it might not be utterly impossible after all —

ARNHOLM. What, Boletta?

BOLETTA. That I might — perhaps agree to — what — what you proposed to me.

ARNHOLM. Do you mean that perhaps you might —? That at least you would grant me the happiness of coming to your aid as a faithful friend?

BOLETTA. No, no, no! Never that! That would be absolutely impossible now. No — Mr. Arnholm — I had rather you should take me —

ARNHOLM. Boletta! Will you —!

BOLETTA. Yes, — I think — I will.

ARNHOLM. You will be my wife?

BOLETTA. Yes; if you still think you — ought to take me.

ARNHOLM. If I think — ! [*Seizes her hand*] Oh, thanks, thanks, Boletta! What you have been saying — your hesitation at first — that does not alarm me. If I do not fully possess your heart as yet, I shall know how to win it. Oh, Boletta, how I will treasure you!

BOLETTA. And I am to see the world; to take part in its life; you have promised me that.

ARNHOLM. And I hold to it.

BOLETTA. And I am to learn everything I want to.

ARNHOLM. I myself will be your teacher, as in the old days, Boletta. Think of the last year you were my pupil —

BOLETTA [*in quiet self-absorption*] Fancy, — to know oneself free — to go out into the unknown world! And then to have no care for the future; no constant fears about miserable money —

ARNHOLM. No, you shall never have to waste a thought

on such things. And, my dear Boletta, that is a good thing too, in its way — isn't it now?

BOLETTA. Yes, it is indeed. I know it is.

ARNHOLM [*putting his arm round her waist*] Oh, you shall see how cozily and comfortably we will arrange our life! And what peace and confidence there will be between us, Boletta!

BOLETTA. Yes, I begin to — I really think — that we ought to get on together. [*Looks out to the right, and hurriedly disengages herself*] Ah! Please don't say anything about it!

ARNHOLM. What is the matter, dear?

BOLETTA. Oh, it's that poor — [*Points*] Over there.

ARNHOLM. Is it your father —?

BOLETTA. No, it's the young sculptor. He is walking over there with Hilda.

ARNHOLM. Oh, Lyngstrand. Why should you trouble about him?

BOLETTA. Oh, you know how delicate and ill he is.

ARNHOLM. Yes, if it isn't all his imagination.

BOLETTA. No, it is real; he cannot live long. But perhaps it is best for him.

ARNHOLM. How best for him, my dear?

BOLETTA. Well, because, — because I don't think much would come of his art in any case. — Let us go before they come.

ARNHOLM. By all means, my dear Boletta. [*Hilda and Lyngstrand appear beside the pond.*]

HILDA. Hi! Hi! Won't you condescend to wait for us?

ARNHOLM. Boletta and I would rather go on ahead. [*He and Boletta go out to the left.*]

LYNGSTRAND [*laughs quietly*] It is quite amusing here just now; everybody goes in couples; always two and two together.

HILDA [*looks after them*] I could almost swear that he is making love to her.

LYNGSTRAND. Really? Have you seen anything to make you think so?

HILDA. Oh yes. It's easy to see it — if you keep your eyes about you.

LYNGSTRAND. But Miss Boletta will not have him. I am sure of that.

HILDA. No. She thinks he looks so frightfully old: and she's afraid he'll soon be bald too.

LYNGSTRAND. Ah, I don't mean only because of that. She would not have him in any case.

HILDA. How can you know that?

LYNGSTRAND. Well, because there is some one else she has promised to keep in her thoughts.

HILDA. Only to keep in her thoughts?

LYNGSTRAND. Yes, while he is away.

HILDA. Oh, then I suppose it's you she is to keep in her thoughts.

LYNGSTRAND. Possibly.

HILDA. Has she promised you that?

LYNGSTRAND. Yes, only think — she has promised me that! But please, please don't tell her that you know about it.

HILDA. Oh, don't be afraid: I am as silent as the grave.

LYNGSTRAND. I think it is so tremendously kind of her.

HILDA. And then, when you come home again — is it to be an engagement? Are you going to marry her?

LYNGSTRAND. No, I scarcely think that would do. You see, marriage is out of the question for me for a few years yet; and then, when I have made my way, she will be a bit too old for me, I fancy.

HILDA. And yet you want her to go on thinking of you?

LYNGSTRAND. Yes; for it would help me so much; as an artist, you understand. And she, having no special vocation of her own in life, can so easily do it. — But it is kind of her, all the same.

HILDA. Do you think, then, that you can get on quicker with your group if you know that Boletta is thinking of you at home here?

LYNGSTRAND. Yes, I imagine so. You see, the knowledge that somewhere in the world a young, exquisite, silent woman is secretly dreaming of one — I think it must be so — so — Well, I scarcely know what to call it.

HILDA. Do you mean — thrilling?

LYNGSTRAND. Thrilling? Oh yes. It is thrilling I mean;

or something of that sort. [*Looks at her a moment*] You are so bright, Miss Hilda; really you are very bright, you know. When I come home again you will be just about as old as your sister is now. Perhaps you will look as she looks now; and perhaps you will have grown like her in mind as well. Very likely you will be, as it were, both yourself and her — in one body, so to speak.

HILDA. Would that please you?

LYNGSTRAND. I don't quite know. Yes, I almost think so. But now — for this summer — I prefer you to be like yourself alone — just exactly as you are.

HILDA. Do you like me best so?

LYNGSTRAND. Yes, I like you exceedingly as you are.

HILDA. H'm, — tell me, — as an artist — do you think I do right in always wearing light summer dresses?

LYNGSTRAND. Yes, I think you do perfectly right.

HILDA. Then you think bright colors suit me?

LYNGSTRAND. Yes, charmingly, to my taste.

HILDA. But tell me — as an artist — how do you think I should look in black?

LYNGSTRAND. In black, Miss Hilda?

HILDA. Yes, all in black. Do you think I should look nice?

LYNGSTRAND. Black is scarcely the thing for the summertime. But for that matter I am sure you would look extremely well in black too. Yes, you have just the figure for it.

HILDA [*gazing before her*] In black right up to the neck — a black ruffle — black gloves and a long black veil behind.

LYNGSTRAND. If you were dressed like that, Miss Hilda, I should long to be a painter — so that I might paint a young, lovely, broken-hearted widow.

HILDA. Or a young girl mourning for her betrothed.

LYNGSTRAND. Yes, that would suit you still better. But you can't wish to dress yourself like that?

HILDA. I don't know; I think it is thrilling.

LYNGSTRAND. Thrilling?

HILDA. Thrilling to think of, yes. [*Points suddenly to the left*] Oh, look there!

LYNGSTRAND [*looking in the direction indicated*] The big English steamer! And right in at the pier!

[*Wangel and Ellida appear by the pond.*]

WANGEL. No, I assure you, my dear Ellida, you are mistaken. [*Sees the others*] What, are you two here? She is not in sight yet, is she, Mr. Lyngstrand?

LYNGSTRAND. The big English boat?

WANGEL. Yes.

LYNGSTRAND [*pointing*] There she lies already, Doctor.

ELLIDA. Ah —! I knew it.

WANGEL. She is come!

LYNGSTRAND. Come like a thief in the night, you might say — softly and noiselessly —

WANGEL. You must take Hilda down to the pier. Make haste! I'm sure she would like to hear the music.

LYNGSTRAND. Yes, we were just going, Doctor.

WANGEL. We will perhaps come afterwards. We'll come presently.

HILDA [*whispers to Lyngstrand*] Another pair, you see. [*She and Lyngstrand go out through the garden to the left. Distant music of wind instruments is heard out on the fiord during what follows.*]

ELLIDA. He has come! He is here! Yes, yes — I feel it.

WANGEL. You had better go in, Ellida. Let me see him alone.

ELLIDA. Oh — it is impossible! Impossible, I say! [*With a cry*] Ah — do you see him, Wangel!

[*The Stranger enters from the left and stops on the footpath, outside the garden fence.*]

THE STRANGER [*bows*] Good evening. I have come again you see, Ellida.

ELLIDA. Yes, yes, yes, — the hour has come.

THE STRANGER. Are you ready to go with me? Or are you not?

WANGEL. You can see for yourself that she is not.

THE STRANGER. I was not thinking of traveling-clothes and trunks and that sort of thing. I have on board with me everything she requires for the voyage; and I have taken a cabin for her. [*To Ellida*] I ask you, then, if you are ready to come with me — to come with me of your own free will?

ELLIDA [*imploringly*] Oh, do not ask me! Do not tempt me so! [*A steamer-bell is heard in the distance.*]

THE STRANGER. There goes the warning bell. Now you must say yes or no.

ELLIDA [*wrings her hands*] To have to decide! To decide for all time! To do what can never be undone!

THE STRANGER. Never. In half an hour it will be too late.

ELLIDA [*looks timidly and intently at him*] What makes you hold to me so persistently?

THE STRANGER. Do you not feel, as I do, that we two belong to each other?

ELLIDA. Do you mean because of that promise?

THE STRANGER. Promises bind no one: neither man nor woman. If I hold to you persistently, it is because I cannot do otherwise.

ELLIDA [*softly and trembling*] Why did you not come sooner?

WANGEL. Ellida!

ELLIDA [*with an outburst of emotion*] Oh — what is it that tempts and allures and seems to drag me into the unknown! The whole might of the sea is centered in this one thing!

[*The Stranger climbs over the garden fence.*]

ELLIDA [*shrinks behind Wangel*] What is it? What do you want?

THE STRANGER. I see it — I hear it in your voice, Ellida — it is me you will choose in the end.

WANGEL [*advances towards him*] My wife has no choice in the matter. I am here to choose for her and — to protect her. Yes, protect her! If you do not get away from here — out of the country — and never come back — do you know what you expose yourself to?

ELLIDA. No, no, Wangel! Not that!

THE STRANGER. What will you do to me?

WANGEL. I will have you arrested — as a felon! At once! Before you can get on board! I know all about the murder out at Skioldvik.

ELLIDA. Oh, Wangel, — how can you — ?

THE STRANGER. I was prepared for that move; and

therefore, — [*Takes a revolver out of his breast pocket*], — I have provided myself with this.

ELLIDA [*throws herself before Wangel*] No, no — do not kill him! Rather kill me!

THE STRANGER. Neither you nor him; be easy on that score. This is for myself; I will live and die a free man!

ELLIDA [*with increasing agitation*] Wangel! Let me tell you this — tell you in his hearing! I know you can keep me here! You have the power, and no doubt you will use it! But my mind — all my thoughts — all my irresistible longings and desires — these you cannot fetter! They will yearn and strain — out into the unknown — that I was created for — and that you have barred against me!

WANGEL [*in quiet grief*] I see it clearly, Ellida! Step by step you are gliding away from me. Your craving for the limitless and the infinite — and for the unattainable — will drive your mind quite out into the darkness at last.

ELLIDA. Oh yes, yes, — I feel it — like black soundless wings hovering over me!

WANGEL. It shall not come to that. There is no other way of deliverance for you; at least I see none. And therefore — therefore I — cancel our bargain on the spot. — Now you can choose your own path — in full — full freedom.

ELLIDA [*gazes at him awhile as if speechless*] Is this true — true — what you say? Do you mean it — from your inmost heart?

WANGEL. Yes, — from the inmost depths of my tortured heart, I mean it.

ELLIDA. And can you do it? Can you carry out your purpose?

WANGEL. Yes, I can. I can — because of my great love for you.

ELLIDA [*softly and tremblingly*] And I have come to be so near — so dear to you!

WANGEL. The years of our marriage have made you so.

ELLIDA [*clasps her hands together*] And I, — I have been blind to it!

WANGEL. Your thoughts went in other directions. But now, — now you are set wholly free from me and mine. Now your own true life can return to its — its right groove

again. For now you can choose in freedom; and on your own responsibility, Ellida.

ELLIDA [*clasps her head with her hands and gazes fixedly towards Wangel*] In freedom — and on my own responsibility? Responsibility! This — this transforms everything. [*The steamer-bell rings again.*]

THE STRANGER. Do you hear, Ellida? The bell is ringing for the last time. Come away!

ELLIDA [*turns towards him, looks fixedly at him, and says with determination in her voice*] I can never go with you after this.

THE STRANGER. You will not go?

ELLIDA [*clings to Wangel*] Oh — after this I can never leave you!

WANGEL. Ellida, — Ellida.

THE STRANGER. It is all over then?

ELLIDA. Yes! Over for all time!

THE STRANGER. I see it. There is something here that is stronger than my will.

ELLIDA. Your will has no longer a feather's weight with me. For me you are a dead man, who has come home from the sea — and who is returning to it again. But I am no longer in terror of you: you fascinate me no more.

THE STRANGER. Good-by, Mrs. Wangel! [*He vaults over the fence*] Henceforth you [1] are nothing but — a bygone shipwreck in my life. [*He goes out to the left.*]

WANGEL [*looks at her awhile*] Ellida — your mind is like the sea: it has its ebb and flow. What brought the transformation?

ELLIDA. Oh, do you not understand that the transformation came, — that it had to come — when I could choose in freedom.

WANGEL. And the unknown, — it fascinates you no longer?

ELLIDA. It neither fascinates nor frightens me. I could have seen into it — gone into it — if I had wished to. I was free to choose it; and therefore I was able to reject it.

WANGEL. I begin to understand you — by degrees. You think and conceive in images — in visible pictures. Your

[1] Here, for the first time, he uses the formal *De.*

longing and yearning for the sea — the fascination that he — the stranger — possessed for you — must have been the expression of an awakening and growing need for freedom within you — nothing else.

ELLIDA. Oh, I don't know what to say to that. But you have been a good physician for me. You found, — and you had the courage to use, — the right remedy — the only one that could help me.

WANGEL. Yes, in the last extremity of danger, we physicians have courage for much. — But now you will come to me again, will you not, Ellida?

ELLIDA. Yes, my dear, faithful Wangel — now I will come to you again. I can now, for now I come to you in freedom — of my own will — and on my own responsibility.

WANGEL [*looks tenderly at her*] Ellida! Ellida! Oh, — to think that we two can now live wholly for each other —

ELLIDA. — and with all our memories in common. Yours — as well as mine.

WANGEL. Yes, all in common, dearest!

ELLIDA. And our two children, Wangel —

WANGEL. Ours you call them!

ELLIDA. They are not mine yet — but I shall win them.

WANGEL. Ours —! [*Kisses her hands joyfully and quickly*] Oh, I thank you for that word more than I can tell.

[*Hilda, Ballested, Lyngstrand, Arnholm, and Boletta come from the left into the garden. At the same time a number of young townspeople and summer visitors pass along the footpath.*]

HILDA [*half aloud, to Lyngstrand*] Just look, — don't she and father look like an engaged couple!

BALLESTED [*who has overheard*] It is summer time, little miss.

ARNHOLM [*looks towards Wangel and Ellida*] The English steamer is under way.

BOLETTA [*goes to the fence*] You can see her best from here.

LYNGSTRAND. The last trip of the season.

BALLESTED. "Soon will all the straits be ice-bound," as the poet says. It is sad, Mrs. Wangel! And I hear we are

to lose you too for a time: you go out to Skioldvik to-morrow, I am told.

WANGEL. No — that plan has come to nothing; this evening we two have changed our minds.

ARNHOLM [*looking from one to the other*] Ah, — really!

BOLETTA [*coming forward*] Father — is this true?

HILDA [*going to Ellida*] Are you going to stay with us after all?

ELLIDA. Yes, dear Hilda — if you will have me.

HILDA [*struggling between tears and joy*] Oh, — can you ask — if I will —!

ARNHOLM [*to Ellida*] This is really quite a surprise!

ELLIDA [*with a grave smile*] Well, you see, Mr. Arnholm — Do you remember what we were speaking of yesterday? When you have once for all become a land-animal — you can never find the way back again — out to the sea. Nor to the sea-life either.

BALLESTED. Why, that's just the case of my mermaid!

ELLIDA. Very like it, yes.

BALLESTED. Only with this difference, that the mermaid — she dies of it. Human beings, on the contrary — they can acclam — accli — matize themselves. Yes, I assure you, Mrs. Wangel, they can ac-cli-matize themselves.

ELLIDA. Yes, in freedom they can, Mr. Ballested.

WANGEL. And under full responsibility, dear Ellida.

ELLIDA [*quickly, holding out her hand to him*] That is the secret.

[*The great steamer glides noiselessly down the fiord. The music is heard closer inshore.*]

CURTAIN

THE CLOSED DOOR

BY

MARCO PRAGA

English Translation by

A. S. MacDonald

INTRODUCTION

For the fourth play in her repertory for her American farewell under Morris Gest's direction, Signora Duse turns back from Ibsen and the north to Italy. To Italy—the Italy of the realist indisputably influenced by Ibsen and by the French Hervieu, pupil likewise of Ibsen. To Marco Praga, in short, and his drama in three acts, "The Closed Door" (*"La Porta Chiusa"*).

For all his fecundity and for all his prominence on the modern Italian stage, Praga is a closed book to us on this side of the Atlantic. "The Closed Door" in this first translation into English is, therefore, an open door between Praga and the American public. That public, if it wishes to know more about the other plays by the same dramatist and about the development of Praga from his earliest play to this, his seventeenth, may find profit in reference to pages 85 to 93 in Dr. Lander MacClintock's "The Contemporary Drama of Italy." It must suffice to note here that Praga, like Gallarati-Scotti, author of "Thy Will Be Done," is Milanese, son of a literary father and now in his sixty-second year, that he has been writing plays since 1887, that "The Virgins" and "The Ideal Wife" are accounted perhaps his best works, and that, as in "The Closed Door," his theme is usually deeply involved in, or skirting the edge of, sexual problems and crises.

"The Closed Door" is probably not Praga's best work; assuredly it is not a great drama for all time. Its anti-climactic last act leans heavily on the poignant peak of the

story when mother, father and son face the future after the revelation of their relationship. That moment, however, is so moving, so pitifully human, so lacking in the cynicism which mars many of his plays, that it excuses many faults. And in the hands of Duse, the entire narrative is ennobled, just as masters of the art of acting from Garrick down to Irving have turned into gold even the works of contemporaries far inferior to Praga.

Whether the choice was made deliberately or not, "The Closed Door" is the third of Duse's plays to stress and make a leading motive out of motherhood. The mothers of "Thy Will Be Done," "Ghosts" and "The Closed Door" would scarcely recognize each other as belonging to the same category: the humble, penitent beggar creeping up the Mount of Calvary on hands and knees, fearful to recognize the son who had repaid her vigil and vow in infant illness by drifting worlds away from her; the intellectually alert but equally helpless Mrs. Alving, brooding, with something far from penitence, on the social code to which she attributes the loss of her son: the sentient Bianca Querceta, struggling within herself to keep the secret of her son's parentage, to hold him near her and still to provide for his peace of mind. That Duse is able to encompass this range and to differentiate these three mothers as authentic individualities while instilling into each of them the secret springs of universal motherhood, is proof of the depth and profundity not only of her art but of her passionately human understanding.

THE EDITOR

CAST OF CHARACTERS.

BIANCA.
MARIOLINA.
IPPOLITO QUERCETA.
GIULIO QUERCETA.
DECIO PICCARDI.
DON LUDOVICO.
MAURILIO.
CHRISTINA.

The action takes place in the villa of Ippolito Querceta, near Varese, Italy, at the present time.

ACT ONE.

ACT ONE.

SCENE: *The salon of the Querceta villa. It is a large room, simply but beautifully furnished. It opens, by semi-circular doors at the back, upon a garden. Left, is a large fireplace; right, an arched doorway, leading into the billiard room. A section of the billiard room, part of the table, and the cue-rack, are visible to the audience.*

Doors lead from the billiard room to other apartments. In the center of the salon, a large table. Near this, a luxurious divan. On the table, a lamp, vases of flowers, books, magazines. Chairs, cabinets, etc. On the walls most beautiful colored engravings. It is evening in September. All lamps are lighted. Moonlight floods the garden outside.

The curtain rising discovers Bianca reading. Mariolina is playing. There is a grand piano at the right. Giulio bends over his cousin, listening to the music. Decio stands in the archway between the two rooms, his back to the audience, watching the players in the billiard room. Ippolito and Don Ludovico are having an exciting billiard game.

Don Ludovico is a priest and wears clerical costume. The other three men are in dinner jackets. Bianca wears a beautiful evening gown; Mariolina, a simple one.

When the curtain rises all are silent. The only sound is Mariolina's soft music.

[*Enter Maurilio, from the rear door of the billiard room. He is a gray-haired servant of fifty, in livery. He carries a tray with siphons, ice, syrups, cordials, etc. He places it on a card table in the salon, and then goes out by the same door he entered. A short pause. Mariolina stops playing.*]

MARIOLINA. Is this the waltz you mean?

GIULIO. No, Mariolina. The one I like is much slower. I don't know its name.

MARIOLINA. But many of the Schumann waltzes have no name. I think this is one of the loveliest. Don't you like it?

GIULIO. Yes. But I think the other more beautiful. You certainly must know it.

MARIOLINA. But I don't remember it. How aggravating!

GIULIO. When I go to Milan tomorrow, I will buy the whole set of Schumann's waltzes for you.

[*Bianca, a little startled by Giulio's words, stops reading, and half closes her book. After a slight pause, and with-*

out turning round, she asks, as if just for the sake of asking.]

BIANCA. You are going to Milan tomorrow, Giulio?

GIULIO. Yes, mother. Can I do anything for you there?

BIANCA. No, Giulio, thank you. [*She opens her book, but can no longer fix her attention upon it.*]

GIULIO [*to Mariolina*] I will send you the music, and you must find the piece. [*Going to the small table, he mixes a drink for himself.*]

MARIOLINA. Without your help? [*She rises and goes to him*] Are you not coming back tomorrow?

GIULIO. No, Mariolina.

MARIOLINA. How shall I find the waltz without you? I don't know it.

GIULIO. I am sure you will recognize it.

MARIOLINA. I shall have to guess.

GIULIO. If you succeed, I'll give you a present when I come back.

MARIOLINA. What?

GIULIO. I'll think about it.

MARIOLINA. When *I* give a present, I know what I wish to give.

GIULIO. I do not. . . . Lack of imagination.

MARIOLINA. No — lack of heart.

GIULIO. Oh — Oh!

MARIOLINA. Well, — lack of sentiment.

GIULIO. What terrific words!

MARIOLINA. In a really kind heart, the wish to give and the gift itself are one and the same thought.

GIULIO [*takes her little nose in his fingers*] Signorina, you stand at the head of your class.

DECIO [*without turning round*] A fluke, Ippolito.

MARIOLINA [*going to Decio, stands beside him, watching the billiard game*] Giulio is becoming unbearable.

DECIO. And you just won't stand it, will you, Mariolina? [*He puts his arm around her waist, paternally affectionate.*]

GIULIO. Mother, shall I mix you a drink?

BIANCA. Is there any iced coffee?

GIULIO. Yes. Will you have some?

BIANCA. Thank you, — half a glass.

GIULIO [*preparing the beverage*] It will keep you awake. I don't know why you *will* drink coffee at night, and then complain of insomnia.

DECIO [*à propos of the billiard game*] Splendid, Don Ludovico. You will make a first-class billiard player.

DON LUDOVICO [*laughing*] Do you think so?

DECIO. A run of twelve. [*Counting the balls that Don*

Ludovico is making] Thirteen. Fourteen. Ah, thirteen was a fatal number for you.

DON LUDOVICO [*making his points*] And yet they say it is a lucky number. [*He goes and stands in front of Decio and Mariolina, his cue in his hand, while Ippolito takes his turn playing.*]

MARIOLINA. You very nearly beat the expert.

DON LUDOVICO. Making fun of me, are you? Look out; the next time you come to confession, I won't give you absolution.

MARIOLINA. Oh, well, I'll go to Don Luigi.

IPPOLITO [*misses his shot. Don Ludovico goes back to play*] Oh, I am out of practice.

MARIOLINA. I told you that Don Ludovico would win.

IPPOLITO. He will have to give me a handicap soon.

[*The game goes on.*]

BIANCA [*in a low tone*] Giulio, what are you going to do at Milan?

GIULIO. Nothing much. Go to the tailor's. Buy a saddle for my new horse. An errand for grandmother.

BIANCA. Can't you do all this and come back for dinner?

GIULIO. No, mother.

BIANCA. You will come back on Saturday, then?

GIULIO. Saturday or Sunday.

BIANCO. And yet you told me . . .

GIULIO. What?

BIANCA. That you were going to Milan. . . .

GIULIO [*rising and going to Bianca*] Why, yes. [*Laughs*] I am not going to run away. [*Bends over her caressingly, his cheek against hers*] My own big sister! They say you are my mother. But who would believe it? This young, beautiful mother of mine, so jealous and so afraid, thinks her great boy of twenty still a baby. And she wants to keep him tied to her apron strings.

BIANCA. Now, Giulio. . . .

GIULIO. But he gets bored here in the country, it is so quiet. So he is going to Milan for a few days without asking her permission. Own up, mother. You think I should ask it. Well, I ask it. Now, please, may I go to Milan for a few days? Yes. Thank you. You are the pearl of mothers, and I will bring you back some *marrons glacés*. [*Kisses her. Then goes and sits at the piano, running his fingers lightly over the keyboard, as if trying to remember the Schumann waltz.*]

DECIO [*leaves Mariolina and goes close to billiard table, much interested in the game*] Wonderful, Don Ludovico! The victory is almost yours. Don't let it slip.

[*Don Ludovico takes his turn. Mariolina stands beside Decio.*]

MARIOLINA. Six balls more and Don Ludovico wins.

BIANCA [*to Giulio*] Lucio Galvani Scotti is in Milan, is he not?

GIULIO [*without turning round*] How do you know?

BIANCA. It is in the newspaper.

GIULIO. I have not read it.

BIANCA. Still, you know he is there.

GIULIO. Yes. He wrote to me.

BIANCA. Ah! [*Hesitates a moment, then rises and goes to Giulio. Gently*] You will see him?

GIULIO. Of course.

BIANCA [*anxiously*] Is that why you are going to Milan?

GIULIO [*a little nervously*] For that — and other things. [*Rises and walks away.*]

BIANCA [*going forward, draws him back. She tries to meet his eyes, but he avoids her gaze*] You are not . . . ? No, not really? Tell me, Giulio.

GIULIO [*his face darkens; he frees his arm from her hand*] No. [*His voice is dull, spiritless*] Because you do not wish it. Because you have denied me the very first favor I ever asked you. But you have denied it, and so we will not speak of it again.

[*Goes to table, nervously pours out a drink. Bianca, almost in a fever, goes to the piano, rests her elbows on the*

keyboard, and her head in her hands. At this moment, Don Ludovico misses his stroke.]

DON LUDOVICO. I am beaten. But look, Signor Piccardi, by a hair.

DECIO. It is hard to stick at forty-nine. But perhaps Ippolito will miss his six.

MARIOLINA. Yes. Uncle Ippolito is not playing in luck.

IPPOLITO. If I fluke now, I will never touch a cue again. Great, to be whipped by a beginner, wouldn't it? [*He plays on. Giulio goes and stands looking out into the garden, lights a cigarette.*]

BIANCA [*in a low voice, gently*] Giulio!

GIULIO [*nervous, incisive*] Mother, don't speak of this again. I am not a boy any longer. Much more of a man than you believe. But you wish me to remain a boy. Your love tries to keep me one. *I* want to be a man, and to get away from this stupid, odious life.

BIANCA [*painfully*] Giulio!

GIULIO. Yes, I mean it, — odious, idiotic. But you won't let me go. Very well. I am only twenty, and so I must obey you. I can't go away, so what are you afraid of? You think I mean to see Galvani Scotti in Milan, and join his expedition?

BIANCA. Giulio!

GIULIO. I gave you my word. So you can set your mind at rest, for the present. We won't mention the subject for another year.

BIANCA. You are terrible.

GIULIO. Not any more than you are to me.

[*Goes out into the garden and disappears. Bianca sighs. Then, during the following conversation, she goes back to the chair in which she was seated at the rise of the curtain. She takes up her book and pretends to read.*]

MARIOLINA. Victory for Uncle Ippolito.

DON LUDOVICO. Whipped again!

[*The players put their cues into the rack and come into the salon, where they join Decio and Mariolina. Ippolito goes to the mantlepiece on which he has left a small ivory pipe, and lights it. The other three come forward into the center of the room.*]

DECIO [*to Ludovico*] But you lost splendidly. Ippolito is a billiard player of the first rank. At the club no one ever beats him.

IPPOLITO. Where is Giulio?

BIANCA. He went into the garden.

[*Ippolito goes out. He is seen to pass into the garden and then disappear.*]

BIANCA [*putting down her book*] Don Ludovico, you have not given me anything to do for a long time. I am

going to see Margherita tomorrow. She is almost well now, and the old bricklayer has gone back to work.

DECIO. The one who hurt his leg?

DON LUDOVICO. Hurt? We thought it would have to be cut off. Donna Bianca saved him.

BIANCA. Oh! Oh! Oh!

DON LUDOVICO. Certainly, — sending a specialist and paying all expenses.

BIANCA. And the Tiraboschi child?

DON LUDOVICO. Out of danger, Donna Bianca.

BIANCA. Do these poor people need anything?

DON LUDOVICO. No. They will have everything they want when the little one is well. He is a dear child.

BIANCA. I must go to the Borchiani tomorrow. They sent for me.

MARIOLINA [*goes over to Bianca, puts her arms about her aunt's neck*] How good you are, aunt!

DON LUDOVICO. She is a saint, — the blessing of the whole countryside.

BIANCA. Oh, please, Don Ludovico.

DON LUDOVICO. But you are. The months you are here in the country we have far less sorrow and suffering. If you could only be here all the time! Especially in winter. Winter is so hard.

MARIOLINA. But my aunt provides even when she is not here.

DON LUDOVICO. But money is not the only thing. It is her presence, her words, that comfort. And sometimes these do more good than money.

BIANCA [*rises; goes towards Don Ludovico, and takes his hands*] Don't make me blush, Don Ludovico. Perhaps before very long I may be here all the time, — even in winter.

MARIOLINA. Oh, aunt, what are you saying! Decio, did you hear her?

DECIO. Yes, I heard.

MARIOLINA. And you don't say anything?

DECIO. My dear child, what can I say?

MARIOLINA. Aren't you astonished?

DECIO. No, because it is not the first time that I have heard your aunt say it.

MARIOLINA. But it is the first time that I have. I don't believe aunt has ever told grandmother, uncle, or Giulio. Did she say to you, Decio, that she wished to live in the country?

DECIO. I know that Donna Bianca has thought of this for quite a long time.

MARIOLINA. But she spoke of it only to you! So you are my aunt's confidant.

DECIO. No. I am an old and very good friend. And there are little things that one confides more quickly to a friend than to one's family. It is easier.

DON LUDOVICO. Do you really mean it, Donna Bianca?

BIANCA [*laughing*] Oh, not at once. Not next winter, anyhow.

MARIOLINA [*more and more astonished*] You mean to stay here the whole time? Not to go away at all? I'll tell grandmother at once.

BIANCA [*seating herself before the fireplace*] Mariolina, don't say anything to grandmother or to anybody else. Won't you sit down, Don Ludovico.

DON LUDOVICO. I am standing here like a ramrod, because the news astonished me so much and gave me so much pleasure. [*He sits on the divan.*]

MARIOLINA. It is a secret, then, aunt?

BIANCA. It is not a secret. It is too simple and unimportant. But it is useless to provoke discussion ahead of time.

MARIOLINA. What about Giulio and Uncle Ippolito?

BIANCA. Uncle Ippolito does not need me. He can live in Milan by himself.

MARIOLINA. And Giulio?

BIANCA. I told you it was not a plan to be carried out immediately.

MARIOLINA. When?

BIANCA. I don't know. You are very curious, Mariolina.

MARIOLINA [*going to her; affectionately*] Excuse me, aunt. But your idea seems to me so strange and so sad.

BIANCA. Sad?

MARIOLINA. Yes, — for me. I am alone with grandmother. Father and mother are dead, and without you, I would have a very dull time in Milan. Unless grandmother decides to live here winters, too; and then I'll be in the country all the time. It won't be very amusing.

BIANCA. Oh, no, — what are you saying? Grandmother would not stay here in winter for a kingdom.

MARIOLINA. But, then . . .

DECIO [*playfully, going towards Mariolina*] But, then, if there is no one else to take you to teas or the theatre, or to parties, there will still remain your old friend Decio.

MARIOLINA. An old friend who is much too young.

DECIO. I am almost thirty years older than you. How old are you? Seventeen. Yes, almost thirty years older than you.

DON LUDOVICO. But unfortunately he does not look it; does he, Mariolina?

DECIO. So I would be a compromising escort? [*Gay and laughing*] Well, then, do you know what I will do?

Come here. [*Takes her by the hand*] I'll marry you. What do you say to that? It is better than nothing, isn't it?

MARIOLINA. Just a little.

DECIO. Sincere, if not flattering.

MARIOLINA [*as the telephone rings*] The telephone. That must be grandmother. [*She goes to the telephone in the billiard room. Meanwhile Ippolito and Giulio are seen walking in the garden. They pause on the threshold. Ippolito is talking to his son and smoking his little pipe. He appears to be telling a story, gesticulating and much amused at it. Giulio appears to listen as if annoyed.*]

MARIOLINA [*at telephone*] Yes. You, grandmother? Who is here? No one. Oh, Don Ludovico and Decio, of course. [*Pause*] I don't know. I'll ask. [*Turns to her aunt*] Grandmother wants to know if you can send somebody home with me.

BIANCA. I don't know. Decio, are you going out?

DECIO. No, Donna Bianca. And besides I refuse to escort Mariolina. She does not wish me, either as escort or as fiancé.

BIANCA [*seeing Ippolito*] Ippolito, are you going out?

IPPOLITO. Yes; I am going to Contessa Bicé's for bridge.

BIANCA. Then you can take Mariolina home?

IPPOLITO. Certainly.

MARIOLINA. You don't mind, Uncle?

IPPOLITO. No. And I will drop in a moment to see grandmother. I have not seen her for a week.

MARIOLINA [*back at telephone*] Are you still there, grandmother? Uncle Ippolito will take me home, and come in for a few moments to see you. [*To Ippolito*] She says that will be a great pleasure, and she asks you to bring her that recipe for almond pudding.

IPPOLITO. I forgot it. [*He presses wall button. Don Ludovico rises and goes over to speak to Giulio.*]

MARIOLINA. What did you say? Don Ludovico? Oh, listen, grandmother. I have something to tell you. I would blush to tell you face to face. I have just had a proposal. From whom? Guess. From Decio.

[*Decio threatens her jokingly. Enter Maurilio.*]

IPPOLITO [*to Maurilio*] The automobile.

[*Exit Maurilio.*]

MARIOLINA [*still at telephone*] What shall I say to him? That he must like chains. All right. I will tell him. Good-by.

DECIO. Making fun of me, are you? [*Pulls her nose.*]

MARIOLINA. No, I was not. Take care of my nose.

BIANCA [*going to the rescue*] Leave her alone, Decio. Don't tease her any more.

MARIOLINA [*to Don Ludovico*] Don Ludovico, grandmother asked if you will dine with us tomorrow.

DON LUDOVICO. Today, Donna Bianca. Tomorrow, the Marchesa. My parishioners will say I am turning into a society man.

BIANCA. It would give my mother so much pleasure.

DON LUDOVICO. You are very good. But two days in succession!

MARIOLINA. Well, the day after tomorrow, then?

DON LUDOVICO. Saturday? No, I must go to Milan Saturday.

[*Ippolito reënters with the recipe book; places it on the mantlepiece; turns over the leaves.*]

BIANCA. Going to Milan? Why, that is a miracle.

DON LUDOVICO. A real miracle. I have not set foot there for a year.

BIANCA. And, if I may ask, Don Ludovico, what are you going to do at Milan?

DON LUDOVICO. I am going to say good-by to a young priest, — a friend of mine, who is leaving for a wild and distant country.

IPPOLITO. A missionary? That is a vocation I never could understand. Of course, it is pleasant to travel, if at the end of a journey one finds a grand hotel.

BIANCA. Where is your friend going? To China?

DON LUDOVICO. No. To a new country. No one knows exactly where it is. To Lucesia.

BIANCA. Ah!

[*Giulio struck by the word, leaves the window and approaching Don Ludovico, listens with great attention.*]

DON LUDOVICO. He leaves Tuesday, on an expedition.

GIULIO. The Galvani Scotti expedition?

DON LUDOVICO. Yes. How do you know about it?

GIULIO. Lucio Galvani Scotti is my friend. Last year he discovered, or perhaps I should say explored, for the first time, a region in East Africa. He calls it Lucesia. [*Becoming more and more excited*] He came back to Italy for capital to develop it. A society was founded. The government, too, has given its support. So now he is going back with better equipment, and a large party of men, — engineers, doctors, workmen and soldiers. And so he is taking a priest with him? I did not know that.

DON LUDOVICO. Yes, he wants a priest, too, because in case of illness or death, it is a comfort to have a priest. And, then, my friend wishes to work, if possible, for the conversion of the natives. Scotti applied to the missions, and a young friend of mine, Don Carlo Perelli, who is strong, courageous, intelligent, and cultured, was chosen. Well, I confess I envy him.

DECIO. You, Don Ludovico?

DON LUDOVICO. If I were only twenty years younger. . . .

DECIO. Would you go?

DON LUDOVICO. With the utmost joy.

[*Meanwhile Giulio, whose face has darkened, has gone toward the billiard table.*]

BIANCA [*anxiously following Giulio with her eyes*] Giulio, are you going out, too?

GIULIO. No, mother. [*Exit, right, through billiard room door.*]

IPPOLITO. Poor boy! Why in the world don't you let him go with Scotti?

[*A long embarrassed silence. Bianca, disdainful and sad, rises from her chair and goes toward the window. Mariolina, who understands it is a painful moment, goes to the piano and pretends to be interested in a music album. Decio lights a cigarette, sitting down at left of table. Ippolito, standing beside mantlepiece, cleans his pipe. Don Ludovico remains alone in the center of the room. He looks about, not understanding.*]

IPPOLITO. Don Ludovico, you have made a break. [*Laughs.*]

DON LUDOVICO. I am extremely sorry. What did I say?

IPPOLITO. Giulio is heartbroken because he cannot join

the expedition to Lucesia. The boy feels he has the stuff of a pioneer in him. But his mother will not let him go.

DON LUDOVICO. Ah, I did not know. Donna Bianca, I am most sorry.

BIANCA [*standing at the open window, her back to the audience*] For what, Don Ludovico?

IPPOLITO. Giulio has lost his head over Lucesia.

DECIO. To be more exact, Galvani Scotti has made him lose it.

IPPOLITO. I think you are mistaken. Indeed, I know you are mistaken. It was Giulio himself who spoke to his friend, who offered himself. He never imagined that his mother would refuse her consent.

BIANCA. As you, too, should have refused it.

IPPOLITO. I? Why? If he has a desire to do something — different — who knows? A dream of glory, — at twenty!

BIANCA [*turning to her husband*] But the risk, the danger?

IPPOLITO. Relatively little. [*Silence*] Well, good-night, everybody. Are you coming, Mariolina? [*Turns away.*]

BIANCA [*almost violently, takes a step towards him*] Yes, and you put all the pain of refusing him upon me.

IPPOLITO. My dear, you know that I have very little influence over Giulio.

BIANCA. You have never known how to win him.

IPPOLITO. Probably. He is so unlike me. Our son resembles only you. And, after all, I cannot reproach myself with putting this idea into his head, either by example or by word. I never stray farther than Paris. He was probably much more influenced by Decio, who is always traveling.

DECIO [*a little dryly*] Ah, indeed! So it is all my fault!

IPPOLITO. Well, wasn't it you who fostered his taste for travel?

DECIO. Exploration is quite a different thing. Donna Bianca and you entrusted Giulio to me, from time to time. But London and Paris can scarcely give one a desire for Lucesia.

IPPOLITO. London and Paris! You took him to Spain, also, and to Constantinople.

DECIO. But not to mid-Africa, or to the Pole.

BIANCA. Don't argue with him, Decio. Ippolito does not know what he is talking about.

IPPOLITO. Thank you, Bianca. What is the matter? You seem to be on edge tonight.

DON LUDOVICO [*going to Bianca*] Yes, she is a little nervous. I am sorry to have brought up the subject, Donna Bianca.

BIANCA. It was not your fault, Don Ludovico. You must excuse us for discussing it at all.

IPPOLITO. Well, you will hear more of it.

DECIO. I think not. The expedition leaves on the eighteenth. When it has gone, Giulio will forget about it, and be his usual self.

IPPOLITO. You think so? I do not.

BIANCA [*anxiously*] Why?

IPPOLITO. Why? Because I do not think the expedition itself counts especially with Giulio. It is only a pretext. The nearest and most convenient. He has had something on his mind for some time. That is the real root of the trouble. If you don't agree with me, so much the worse for you. I have observed him closely, and have understood him more clearly than you. Perhaps, because I take him much more coolly and calmly.

BIANCA. Mariolina, will you please go and see if the automobile is ready?

MARIOLINA. Yes, aunt. [*She crosses the room and goes out the door in billiard room.*]

BIANCA. Now, Ippolito, just what do you mean?

IPPOLITO. Giulio has something on his mind that troubles him.

BIANCA. What?

IPPOLITO. How do I know?

BIANCA. Why do you think so?

IPPOLITO. I do not think. I observe. Giulio is restless and irritable. Does he seem so to you, Decio?

DECIO. No.

IPPOLITO. Why, he is in a murderous state of mind. No interest in anything. He has given up riding and tennis. He, the champion of Lombardy.

DON LUDOVICO. Perhaps he is in love.

IPPOLITO. No. At his age, love is a matter of light women. You will excuse me for speaking plainly, Don Ludovico. That type of love means endless money, and he has not asked me for a penny. [*To Bianca*] Has he asked you?

BIANCA [*nervous and disturbed*] No.

IPPOLITO. Or you, Decio?

DECIO. Asked me? Are you crazy, Ippolito?

IPPOLITO. Why, that would not be strange. We are all great friends, and he would know you would give him what he wished and say nothing about it.

DECIO. You are absurd.

IPPOLITO. Very well. Find out what is the matter yourself.

BIANCA. No, you should find it out. You are his father.

IPPOLITO. But we get on each other's nerves so easily. You must question him, Bianca. Or, better still, Decio. Of us all, he is most in Giulio's confidence.

DECIO. Again, you exaggerate.

IPPOLITO. Oh, I am not jealous of you. Despite the difference in age, you and Giulio are the best of friends. It is natural to confide in a friend rather than in father or mother. . . . Where are you, Mariolina?

[*Mariolina comes in through billiard room.*]

MARIOLINA. Here I am. The automobile is ready.

[*Ippolito goes out the door in billiard room. Mariolina embraces Bianca.*]

MARIOLINA. I have had a pleasant time. Thank you, aunt. Good-night.

BIANCA [*kisses her*] Good-night, Mariolina. Kiss grandmother for me, and tell her that I shall see her tomorrow.

MARIOLINA. Good-night, Don Ludovico. Oh, tomorrow you dine with us, do you not?

DON LUDOVICO. Really?

BIANCA. Yes, you must go.

DON LUDOVICO. Very well. A thousand thanks to your grandmother. Good-night. [*Kisses Mariolina on the forehead.*]

BIANCA. Aren't you going to wear anything on your head? It is a little chilly.

MARIOLINA. Oh, my scarf. Where is it? [*She looks around and finds it on a chair*] Here it is. Good-night . . . fiancé.

DECIO [*a little nervous and excited, is standing near the fireplace*] Good-night, Mariolina.

[*Ippolito reënters with a cap on his head.*]

IPPOLITO. Excuse me, Don Ludovico, I did not ask if I could put you down at the rectory.

BIANCA. No; let Don Ludovico stay a little while longer.

DON LUDOVICO. Yes, I would rather take a short walk before going to bed. Thank you.

MARIOLINA [*waving her hand gayly*] Good-night. [*She and Ippolito go out.*]

BIANCA [*before the door is closed, — to Decio*] Decio, did you hear what my husband said?

DECIO. What of it? A mere supposition.

BIANCA. Ippolito is not very intelligent, but he is shrewd. He weighs what he says, and sees more clearly than one would suppose. Lucesia only a pretext? Giulio deeply troubled? It does not seem possible that I have been so blind.

DON LUDOVICO. Of course, it is not possible. A mother like you, whose only child adores her.

DECIO. Ippolito was joking. You must not take him seriously, and worry about it. If Giulio is restless, it is easy to find a very natural reason. He is young, intelligent, anxious to distinguish himself. At twenty we are all ambitious. Art and science for some, — sport for others.

[*Changing his tone, laughing a little, but he means it*] Now, if Giulio wanted to fly, you would have something to worry about.

BIANCA. Don't joke.

DECIO. I am quite serious. I think aviation the terror of all mothers. As to Giulio, — he must choose a career, and, Donna Bianca, you have not made it easy for him. Your love holds him back from so much, places so many obstacles in his way. Well, the Galvani Scotti expedition made a profound impression on him. The lure of the unknown has seized his imagination. That is all. Do you not agree with me, Don Ludovico?

DON LUDOVICO. Absolutely, Signor Piccardi.

DECIO. And the new and unknown is more fascinating because of the way you have brought him up. Yours was, in some ways, an excellent method, but you have held him with too tight a rein. You have not allowed him to pursue his studies, because that entailed separation from you. There is an excess of vitality and energy in him that demands an outlet.

BIANCA. You would let him go?

DECIO. With Galvani Scotti? No. But I should try to find a substitute. Meanwhile, I should not torment myself trying to clear up a mystery that does not exist.

BIANCA. Where is he now? [*Goes to the door leading to the garden. Calls*] Giulio.

GIULIO [*in the garden but not very near*] Yes, mother.

BIANCA. Aren't you cold out there?

[*Giulio appears on threshold. He is smoking.*]

GIULIO. Do you want me for anything?

BIANCA. What were you doing?

GIULIO. Nothing. I stepped out into the garden to smoke.

BIANCA. You can smoke here. It is cold out there.

GIULIO. No, it is not at all cold. [*He closes the window*] Mariolina has gone?

BIANCA. Yes; with father.

DON LUDOVICO. And now I must go, too. It is late, Donna Bianca.

BIANCA. Good-night, Don Ludovico.

DON LUDOVICO [*shaking her hand*] Good-night. [*In a low tone*] And courage.

DECIO [*shaking hands*] I shall see you Saturday.

DON LUDOVICO. Good-night, signor. Good-night, Giulio.

GIULIO. I will go with you, Don Ludovico. [*He goes with him towards the door at the back. Bianca, restless and disturbed, arranges some flowers in the vases and puts some trifles on the table in order, mechanically.*]

DECIO. I assure you, there is nothing to worry about.

[*Bianca does not answer. A silence. Then Giulio comes in, throws his cap on the chair and flings himself on the divan. Another pause.*]

DECIO [*with forced gayety*] Donna Bianca, would you like a game of écarté, or shall we play dummy bridge? What do you say, Giulio?

GIULIO. We would be four dummies then.

DECIO. Thank you. Thank you also for your mother.

GIULIO. I was only joking.

DECIO. But it was not a very pretty joke. Donna Bianca, do you care to play?

BIANCA. No, Decio. I am going to my room very soon. I have letters to write.

GIULIO. Then let us have a game of chess. [*He goes to the table, takes out a box of chessmen and board, and begins to arrange them.*]

BIANCA. Why didn't you go out for awhile, Giulio, — to the club, or to call?

GIULIO. They bore me.

DECIO. Everything bores you.

GIULIO. The same old talk. Such stupid fools!

DECIO [*jokingly*] What a superman you have become in a short time!

GIULIO. Superman? No. Man, perhaps.

DECIO. At twenty!

GIULIO. Twenty for some counts as much as forty for others.

DECIO. Profoundly true.

GIULIO [*nervously; getting out the chessmen*] Don't irritate me, please. Which will you take, the red or the white?

DECIO. The red. [*A short silence, while they are placing their pieces*] Giulio, would you like to go to Aix-les-Bains with me?

GIULIO. No, thank you.

DECIO. Why not?

GIULIO. Because it would not amuse me.

BIANCA. How can you speak in that way, when Decio is so good as to invite you!

GIULIO. Decio is most kind, — kindness personified. But he would take me by the hand, and pick every pebble out of my way. I have had enough of big cities and watering-places.

DECIO. Pummm!

GIULIO. Let me be! Just leave me alone, in God's name!

DECIO. My bishop and my castle. You are lucky.

GIULIO. Yes, I am marvelously lucky.

[*A pause. Then Bianca approaches Giulio and places her hand lightly on his shoulder.*]

BIANCA. Good-night, Giulio. [*Giulio and Decio rise.*]

GIULIO. Good-night, mother. [*Bianca kisses him.*]

BIANCA. Giulio, are you angry with me?

GIULIO [*almost at the end of his self-control*] Why, no, mother. [*Bianca kisses him again. As she turns aside she gives her hand to Decio.*]

BIANCA. Good-night, Decio. [*Decio kisses her hand. His gaze follows her as she slowly goes out through the left entrance. The door is scarcely closed when Giulio has a seizure of almost furious impatience.*]

GIULIO. Damnation! [*As if he had need of physical expression, he pushes the chair on which he has been seated and overturns it. He walks up and down.*]

DECIO. Giulio! [*He goes toward him.*]

GIULIO. Leave me alone. [*Decio grasps him firmly, however, his hand on his shoulder.*]

DECIO. Giulio! What is the matter with you? You are making your mother suffer. And you have always been so good, just like her. There must be some reason for all this. What is it? Won't you tell me? [*Giulio breaks away and goes and leans on the mantlepiece.*]

GIULIO [*almost violently*] I wish to be free! I must go away!

DECIO. You wish to go away?

GIULIO. Yes, and you must convince my mother. You must make her understand.

DECIO. Make her understand? First of all, I myself must understand.

GIULIO [*a moment of uncertainty; then he conquers himself and goes to the divan and sinks down upon it*] You were twenty yourself once. Did you never feel an almost frantic wish to do something — to be someone? [*In a change of tone*] Of course, your circumstances were different from mine, and then the times were different.

DECIO [*looking at him fixedly*] What are you saying?

GIULIO. I say that I must go away. Do something. Be someone, — someone, do you understand? I can't lead this life. I can't be just Signor Querceta. I don't wish to be. I wish to take another name, and to make another life for myself.

DECIO. What are you saying!

GIULIO. I can't live here any longer. That is all there is to it. I can not possibly tell my mother, and my father, — or he who ought to be my father. . . .

DECIO. What are you saying!

GIULIO. I mean it. What kind of father is he? What does he know of me? What has he done for me? A man of his stamp, — to eat, to drink, to dress in London clothes, — to amuse himself, in his own way! That is his life. Yet,

mark you, he is the one who understands me now. He would let me go. Perhaps because I am of no special importance to him. But he does not count in this. He is only Signor Querceta. His wife's husband, and at the same time, a perfect stranger to her.

DECIO. Giulio!

GIULIO. And I am the victim of my mother's unreasoning love. She wishes me to live here with her. To fritter away my time, — like that perfect idiot, her . . .

DECIO. Stop!

GIULIO. No! In two or three years I shall marry Mariolina, and have children; and they will grow up and go on with the same thing.

DECIO. Giulio, are you crazy?

GIULIO. No, I am not crazy. I am telling you the truth. [He *rises to go away, but Decio restrains him.*]

GIULIO [*without looking at Decio*] Let me go to bed.

DECIO. You would not sleep. What strange words you have just spoken, Giulio! What brutal words! And yesterday you were only a boy.

GIULIO. Let me alone.

DECIO. I have noticed the restlessness of your spirit and your sudden change of mood. But, tonight, — now . . . What is the matter? Is it really true? Is the African expedition only a pretext? Is your father right?

GIULIO. My father! — You have said it. [*He breaks away from Decio, with a bitter little laugh*] He is the only one who understands. It is extraordinary. [*He goes to the mantlepiece and turns his back.*]

DECIO. He understands, — what?

GIULIO. No matter.

DECIO. Oh, yes, it does matter. Perhaps I am nothing to you. But you are much to me. I have a great affection for you. I have known you almost from the time you were born. You have grown up under my eyes. I am an old friend, — a very old friend of your family. I taught you to ride and to fence. And then you traveled with me. You have lived with me for months at a time, because your mother trusted me. I am your oldest friend, the devoted and admiring friend of your mother. For her sake, as well as for your own, your happiness is of great moment to me. And you are very unhappy?

GIULIO. Very.

DECIO. And that reacts upon your mother. You are old enough to know that her marriage is far from perfect. There is in it no union of ideas or purposes, — no intimacy. Your father and she are so different. Therefore, your mother, a creature of exquisite sensitiveness, has given her whole heart to you.

GIULIO. Go on.

DECIO. I do not need to praise your mother to you. You know and love her as she deserves. But I feel I should explain my interest in you. You have always been like a young brother to me. If I dared, I should say, like a beloved son. Now you have grown up. If I tried the paternal attitude, you would send me to the devil, wouldn't you? One father is enough. Two, rather a surfeit of a good thing. [*Pauses.*]

GIULIO. Well?

DECIO. I have already said my say. Your words and attitude of mind disturb me. There must be a reason. Something new in your life, that neither your mother, your father, nor myself know. Won't you tell me? Confide in me, Giulio?

GIULIO. It is nothing new.

DECIO. So there is something? Then your obstinate silence is absurd. It is almost offensive toward me. You treat me as a stranger.

GIULIO. No, — I don't think of you as a stranger, and that is why . . . [*He breaks off.*]

DECIO. What, Giulio?

GIULIO. You know.

DECIO. I?

GIULIO. Yes, you only,— you alone.

DECIO. I only! What do you mean?

GIULIO. The truth! — Father!

DECIO [*as if struck by a bludgeon*] What are you saying!

GIULIO [*with extreme emotion*] You are my father!

DECIO [*a prey to indescribable emotion, is at first undecided as to what to say. Then, as if obeying an imperious duty*] Are you mad?

[*Giulio just gestures: "Be silent; don't deny it, it is useless; I know." Decio sinks upon the divan. A long silence. Giulio goes to Decio, puts his hand lightly upon his shoulder. Decio looks up and meets Giulio's loving gaze. He rises, takes his son in his arms. After a minute, Giulio gently disengages himself and withdraws a few paces.*]

DECIO. Giulio!

GIULIO [*in a thread of a voice*] No more. Not now. [*With a gesture, he indicates his mother's room*] *She* must not know.

DECIO. She could not bear it. We have done so much to keep it from you. We have always had such respect for you, for your home, for ourselves, — for our secret. It was a religion to us. How did you find it out?

GIULIO. Be silent!

DECIO. Who betrayed us?

GIULIO. No one. . . . Please, no more.

DECIO. One thing — did we ourselves reveal it?

GIULIO. No — no! Be silent. My mother may come — may hear.

DECIO. Ah, no! Not your mother! Not one word! It is our secret, — yours and mine. Promise me this.

GIULIO. Yes. It is our secret. [*Pause*] And now you understand why I wish to go away.

DECIO. No.

GIULIO. No? You don't understand? Oh!

DECIO [*decidedly*] Giulio, I must speak to you. Not here. Come into my room.

GIULIO. No! — No!

DECIO. Yes. I must tell you.

GIULIO. Leave me alone. I beg of you! I can't stand any more.

DECIO. Giulio, I beseech you!

GIULIO. You must not tell me anything. I will not listen.

DECIO. Ah, yes!

GIULIO. Not now.

DECIO. At once. I can not leave it now. There are so many things I must tell you — about myself — about you — about her. Everything! For you must pardon us.

GIULIO. What?

DECIO. Oh, I don't know why. I only feel that you ought to pardon. Come! Come!

GIULIO. Not now.

DECIO. I beg you! [*In a thread of a voice*] Giulio! My son! [*Giulio rises, glances rapidly around*] There, — in my room. Your mother . . . I will open this door softly. From the threshold I can see her door, — if there is a light. [*Giulio joins Decio. They look*] Is there a light?

GIULIO. Yes.

DECIO. She is still awake. Don't make any noise. Come!

[*Decio throws his arm round Giulio's shoulder. Together they go into Decio's room.*]

CURTAIN.

ACT TWO.

ACT TWO.

SCENE: *Decio's bedroom in the Querceta villa. At the right is a bed, prepared for the night. At the foot of the bed is a couch. Beside the bed, a night table. The back wall has two doors, one leading into the corridor, the other into a dressing room. At the right is a large window, and a writing table. Easy chairs, etc.*

When the curtain rises, the room is dark, though moonlight streams in from the open window.

Decio and Giulio come in. As he enters, Decio turns on the electric light.

DECIO. Sit down, Giulio.

[*Giulio sinks into a chair. Then Decio goes to the window and is about to shut it.*]

GIULIO. Leave it open. It is suffocating here.

DECIO [*in a low voice, full of intense emotion*] Giulio, there is much to tell you. You should know everything.

GIULIO [*motionless, without raising his head*] Nothing about her, — about my mother.

DECIO. Yes, Giulio, you ought to know, so that you

may love her even more, — may adore her. [*He puts his hand on Giulio's head. Giulio turns round and looks at him, then away*] Look at me. [*He bends over him*] How are you going to look at me?

[*Giulio rises, puts his arm around Decio's neck. A knock at the door. Decio takes a step toward the entrance, while Giulio slips back into the chair.*]

Who is it?

MAURILIO [*outside*] It is I, Signor Decio.

DECIO. Maurilio? Come in.

[*Maurilio enters. He has a hot water can.*]

MAURILIO. I have brought your hot water.

DECIO. Thank you.

[*Maurilio goes into the dressing room; leaves the hot water can; comes out immediately.*]

MAURILIO. Is there anything else I can do for you, signor?

DECIO. No, thank you.

MAURILIO. And you, Signor Giulio?

GIULIO. Nothing. You may go to bed. You need not stay up on my account.

MAURILIO. I am waiting for Signor Ippolito. He is still out. Good-night, signor.

DECIO. Good-night, Maurilio.

[*Exit Maurilio. Decio goes to window.*]

DECIO. You are right. It is suffocating. [*Then he turns to Giulio.*]

GIULIO. Decio, you must not tell me anything. *I* must speak to you. *You* have nothing to say to me. What I know is enough. What I do not know does not concern me. I wish to go away. It is necessary for me to go away. If you do not understand this absolute necessity, I do not know what to say to you. You ought to understand and help me. A closed door confronts me. I must open it. Otherwise I stifle, — otherwise I die.

DECIO. Giulio, listen to me.

GIULIO. No!

DECIO. You must not take this the way you do.

GIULIO [*rapidly and excitedly*] I can take it in only one way. I suppose there are many sons who are willing to call their mother's husband father, though he is not. They who can accept this easily are fortunate. But I can not. I can not. Don't you see why? You ought to. Your blood is in my veins. Put yourself in my place. What would you do?

DECIO. Oh, Giulio!

GIULIO. What would you do, once your conscience was awakened? When all of a sudden a veil lifted, and you saw the *truth?* Tell me, what would you do? [*Pause*] You don't answer.

DECIO. I shall. Only let me pull myself together. I scarcely know what is in my heart. Whether this is a thing of horror, or whether it is a beautiful liberation. Be patient. But let me tell you one thing, first of all. When you spoke your first words, do you know what I most feared? [*Rising*] That you would think me your mother's lover. Her lover, — only. It was horrible. [*Clasps Giulio's hand*] But you called me father, and I knew you understood. Then, what took place within me! I hardly know myself. What did I say? That you were mad? I should have. I should have denied it, for her — for your mother's sake. Then another terror seized me. Who betrayed us? Was it she? Was it I? But how? One only love in both our lives, — you. One only thought — intense, constant, — that never forgot for one single instant to respect itself, and to respect, for love of you, all that surrounded you, — your home, your name. Your name, because to give you another would mean shame and ruin.

GIULIO [*suddenly*] Who knows?

DECIO. Oh, Giulio, don't say that! Don't say it! [*A short silence*] But we did not betray our secret, — not by an act, a gesture, a word? Tell me.

GIULIO [*nervously*] No. No. No.

DECIO. Then — how? When? . . .

GIULIO [*with evident reluctance*] I do not know. What

does it matter? And why torture me and torture yourself? All this no longer counts. Yesterday and today are so far apart. Rather let us decide about my future — we must decide.

DECIO [*affectionately, winningly*] No, Giulio. I must know everything. It is necessary so that we may defend ourselves, — that we may defend you. Tomorrow we must face your mother. We shall all meet after what has happened between us. Do you wish her to read this in our faces?

GIULIO [*terrified*] No! Not that! It would kill her.

DECIO. You don't wish that, do you? You love her, respect her, now as you always did. Don't you, Giulio?

GIULIO [*sincerely*] As always.

DECIO. Then tell me all. Arm me against the danger that your mother will find out, or guess. Arm me against treachery, and the malice of evil tongues. Who told you? Don't be afraid. Who was it?

GIULIO [*after a moment's hesitation*] No one.

DECIO. Don't lie to me. Someone told. Or was it an anonymous letter?

GIULIO. No. . . . I found it out myself. Your jealous care was useless. Something stronger told me. [*With a bitter smile*] Oh, not the voice of blood. I am the best proof in the world that the voice of blood does not exist.

It was — instinct, perhaps. And, then, if you only think, all this was so absolutely simple.

DECIO. Absolutely simple?

GIULIO. You were always at our house.

DECIO. As your mother's friend, — as her brother.

GIULIO. Yes, — so you seemed to the eyes of a child. But a child does not reason, — it feels. And I felt your affection, your watchful love for me, and I loved you unconsciously, more than — the other, who was kind to me, but without warmth or depth. Then when I grew up, the habit was formed. There was no sense of rebellion. Only at times a vague, indistinct feeling of disquiet. Fleeting sensations that I did not dwell upon, — that I did not wish to dwell upon.

DECIO. And then?

GIULIO. No, — let me go now.

DECIO. I beg you! It is to defend your mother.

GIULIO. Well, if what has happened is an evil, if it may hurt my mother, then the day I was no longer a boy, you should have told me.

DECIO [*sorrowfully*] Giulio!

GIULIO. I am not telling you what you should have done. But I say that secrecy has been to blame for what has happened. Because the time came, — it had to come — when I began to suspect. Your affection for me . . .

your friendship for us, was too unusual. You, young, rich, intelligent, seemed to have nothing in the world, except us. . . .

DECIO. And that is true.

GIULIO. I wondered that you knew no women. You did not seem a man to be content with vulgar loves of a day or an hour. Then what? [*Rises — walks away.*] No! Don't torment me any longer.

DECIO. I am sorry, but you must go on.

GIULIO [*in a low voice, not looking at Decio*] I spied. It was horrible, but it was stronger than myself. Every act, — every gesture of my mother and of you, — I watched. I thought something would betray you. I hid outside doors — behind curtains, — and at night. . . . [*Covers his face with his hands*] Degrading — infamous, but I *had* to find out. [*Almost joyfully*] Nothing! Nothing! You were alone — you and she — and yet there was only her affectionate cordiality toward you, your respectful affection for her. So I was certain there was nothing between you. Ah, how happy I was. You understand? For I knew my mother had no lover. And so I gave myself completely to her love, to your affection.

DECIO [*in a thread of a voice*] And then?

GIULIO. Then — then — I do not know. Then came the other revelation. The veil suddenly lifted, and I knew

the other truth, less painful and more solemn. You were no longer my mother's lover, but you were my father. I understood there was a mystery about me.

DECIO. A mystery?

GIULIO [*going up to him — decidedly*] It does not concern me. I know I am not a Querceta, and that is enough. But I will not accept my legal name. You gave me intelligence and a heart. I can not call myself Piccardi, — so I wish to call myself just anything, and go away.

DECIO [*terrified*] Go away? Where? How?

GIULIO. I do not know. Not forever. But until this crisis is over and the storm within me calmed. A pause in my life, — a time of peace and silence. So, I must have a pretext. Lucesia is the best opportunity. Help me. This is all I ask of you. If you do, you save me. [*Pause — then Decio goes to him.*]

DECIO. You have said there is a mystery.

GIULIO. But I do not wish to know it.

DECIO. There is no mystery, — and you must know.

GIULIO. I refuse to listen.

DECIO. As I had to know about you, so you will have to know about me, — about us. Because you must measure the extent of our fault. . . .

GIULIO. There is no fault. I feel that. Let me keep this feeling. An explanation, — a revelation of the past

will not change, only profane it. No, be silent. I guessed the past myself. Let me keep it as I divined it. Let it be *my* past, — and say no more about it.

[*Through the open window one hears Bianca's voice calling.*]

BIANCA [*in the garden, not far away, as if she were standing on the threshold of the salon*] Giulio! Giulio!

DECIO. It is she. She is calling you.

BIANCA. Giulio!

[*Decio switches off the lights. The room remains dark. Through the window comes a little ray of moonlight, and a thread of light from the half open door of the dressing room.*]

GIULIO. Why did you turn out the lights?

DECIO. If she sees my room lighted, she will call and question me. What can I say to her? [*Pause*] No, we must neither of us see her now. Let us hope she will give it up. Wait! [*Tiptoes to the window*] There is still a light downstairs.

BIANCA. Giulio!

GIULIO. This is terrible! [*A longer pause.*]

DECIO. She will think you are out, and will go back to her room. Be quiet! Wait! [*Giulio sits down, overcome*] You will have to tell her tomorrow that you were out. That you went to find — Ippolito. Or we will tell

her we went out together for a short walk. That we went farther than we meant, and came in late. She is looking for you. She is restless, — disturbed.

GIULIO. Perhaps something has happened to her?

DECIO. No — She is just uneasy.

GIULIO. What shall I do? Go to her?

DECIO. What will you say to her? [*Pause.*]

BIANCA [*calls in a louder voice, but farther off*] Giulo! Giulio!

GIULIO. You go down.

DECIO. And what shall *I* say to her? And my face ravaged with emotion. She will read it, as she would read yours.

GIULIO. But she keeps on. She is still calling.

DECIO [*listens*] No, — she has stopped. Perhaps she has gone back to her room. [*Pause*] Let us slip out now, very quietly, and come back talking in loud tones. Meantime, bathe your eyes. Quickly! [*Giulio rises, goes toward the dressing room. At this point a soft tap on the door is heard*] Your mother! [*Pushes Giulio into the dressing room*] Quiet! Who is it?

BIANCA [*outside, in a low, breathless voice*] It is I, Decio.

DECIO [*closing the dressing room door*] You, Donna Bianca?

BIANCA. Are you in bed?

DECIO [*after a moment's hesitation*] No. . . .

BIANCA. May I come in?

DECIO [*turns on the lights*] Why,— certainly. [*Opens the door. Enter Bianca, in a loose housegown*]

DECIO [*gaining self-possession*] What do you wish? Is anything the matter?

BIANCA. Giulio? Where is he?

DECIO. Isn't he in his room?

BIANCA. Didn't you hear me call him?

DECIO [*pointing to the dressing room*] I was in there. I couldn't hear.

BIANCA. I could not go to sleep without knowing that he was in bed, and at peace. I tiptoed to his room, — he was not there. I looked in the garden, — called. Nothing!

DECIO. He must have gone out.

BIANCA. No. Maurilio told me he had not gone out; that he was here with you. Where is he?

DECIO. My dear Bianca. . . .

BIANCA. He was here. You spoke with him? What did he say to you? [*Observing Decio closely*] Decio, your face, — your eyes. What has happened? Where is he? What are you hiding from me? Where is Giulio?

[*The dressing room door opens and Giulio appears.*]

BIANCA [*with a little cry*] Giulio! My Giulio! [*Looking at him*] You were crying! Why? What does it all mean? Decio, — tell me. [*She is afraid to understand. Then, questioningly*] No! Not that!

[*Decio lowers his eyes, but remains silent, overcome. Bianca utters a cry as if she were dying, and sinks into a chair, burying her face in her hands. Decio gestures his desperate grief. He and Giulio look at each other. Giulio does not hesitate; in an outburst of love and pity, he kneels, embraces and caresses his mother. In a voice of deep emotion but always restrained, he calls her, each time accenting it more.*]

GIULIO. Mother! Mother! Mother!! Here is Giulio. Your Giulio. I am speaking to you! Listen to me! Mother!!!

[*Decio closes the door and then the window. He remains apart, by the window.*]

GIULIO [*seeing that Bianca remains passive, as if she had fainted, turns to Decio*] Help me!

DECIO [*approaching, leans over Bianca*] My dear, Giulio knows it is not our fault, or that the fault was mine alone. But he has pardoned me. He loves you, — he worships you. Bianca — he is at your feet. He is calling to you.

GIULIO. Mother! My mother!

BIANCA [*raises herself a little. Her face is ashen, her*

eyes sunken, unseeing, as if they did not wish to see] Giulio. . . .

GIULIO. Yes, mother, it is Giulio.

BIANCA [*not daring to look at him*] You know! He told you, — Decio! Oh, the selfishness of men, — even the best! How infamous!

GIULIO. No, mother, — Decio told me nothing. I swear it.

BIANCA [*looking at him fixedly*] Nothing? Then what do you know? Ah, my poor boy, what do you know? [*A new thought strikes her*] Is that why you wish to go away?

GIULIO [*rising but remaining close to his mother*] Yes. But not for always. I don't wish to leave you. But I was saying to — to Decio, before you came in, I need to pull myself together. I need to make another *I*. So I must go away from here. Far from home, — to breathe a different air. To see other people. To occupy my mind. To quiet my heart. You understand, mother, as, — as *he* does? You won't admit it. You can't, — because you love me. Mother, sit down. Look at me. Let us talk it over calmly. We can, now that the storm is over. We are just three good friends discussing a case, quite outside *our* lives. Mother, you ought to understand my need. You ought to admit it. Of course, it is a sacrifice, — a little

sacrifice that I ask you. You have made so many for me. Make this one, and let me go.

BIANCA [*timidly*] To travel? A wonderful voyage? [*Giulio shakes his head*] A long journey, with Decio? I can go with you.

GIULIO. No, — no, mother. Don't be blind. I am twenty. Don't you know what people would say, of a journey we three should take?

BIANCA. What people would say?

GIULIO. Why, yes. They would think. . . . Oh, mother, don't make me say it. . . . And what good would two months, six months, away, do me? I should come back with everything unchanged. No. I must make a life for myself. Do something to make me worth while to myself, and in the eyes of others. Perhaps I shall not succeed. But at least people will say, "He tried to do something for himself; he is not idling away his life, waiting for the wealth of both his fathers."

DECIO. That has been said?

GIULIO. No; because I would have killed whoever said it. But I have felt their smothered laughter and mockery. Everyone in our little world knows, and so I must live it down away from here.

DECIO. And I put this in your head.

GIULIO. You? A year ago my fine father, after a

drink or two of champagne, said at his club, "My son is the son of my best friend." The remark was overheard. It was not believed, but they told me, so as to see how I would take it. I understood perfectly. He had said this to brazen out the situation.

BIANCA [*in a thread of a voice*] Giulio!

GIULIO. Public opinion has never attacked either of you. [*To Decio*] You have done what any one would have done, and my mother is respected, because the world at heart is just, and understands that not even a saint married to that man could have acted otherwise.

DECIO [*trying to silence him*] Giulio!

GIULIO. I rebel, but what can I do. I can not go into the public streets and cry out, "Spare me your scorn, gentlemen. I know that I am not Signor Querceta's son, but what do you wish me to do? I cannot change my name."

DECIO. Enough, Giulio.

GIULIO. Oh, a journey! Yes, but a very far journey. Away from civilization. Away from the world that knows, that observes, comments. Lucesia! There is something to do there. There I can make a name for myself. A new one, — mine alone. There nobody knows. It is a land of savages, and savages are good people.

DECIO [*violently*] Be silent, Giulio! Are you mad? Look at your mother.

GIULIO. Yes, I am mad. Mad! Let me go! Let me go! [*He goes toward the door.*]

BIANCA. Don't go! Decio, stop him! Giulio, you are killing me.

[*Decio holds Giulio back.*]

BIANCA [*in a low voice, broken with emotion*] I feel as if I should die, here tonight, of grief, — of shame. But even so, that would not change things. I can not give you another name. All I can do is to free you. To let you go where you will. To do what you will. I hold you back no longer. Go — tomorrow, if you wish. I can free you even without dying. It is my punishment.

[*Decio is going towards her, but she gestures him back.*]

GIULIO [*murmurs*] Mother!

BIANCA. Yes, it is a just punishment. It had to come. It has come.

GIULIO. Mother, forgive me. I was crazy. I was mad.

BIANCA. No, my poor child, you were not mad. And it is you who must forgive me, now and always. Because there is no excuse for a woman, — there never is — who has done what I have done. The world is just, as you have said, and has spared me. Circumstances lighten a fault a little, but they do not destroy it. I won't tell you what excuse I had. I won't tell you about my marriage,

and the martyrdom that began a few months after it. I shall tell you nothing of all this. Why should I? Because I know that if I had been the unhappiest woman in the world, — the most ill-treated, — that would not have given me the right . . .

GIULIO [*imploringly*] Mother! Have pity on me.

BIANCA [*rises, holds herself very erect; with great dignity, but with great emotion in her voice*] Yes, Giulio, I give you *all* my pity. If I did not, my woman's dignity would be enough to keep me silent. It would not allow me to say all that I could say to excuse me in your eyes. But there is one thing I must tell you.

GIULIO. No, mother!

BIANCA. There are some things that I must and can tell you without giving you pain.

GIULIO. Not now! Not now!

BIANCA. When? If you go away, who knows if I shall see you again? I shall speak now, — then go to my room to pray. Listen. The day that I knew I was to be a mother, I realized my fault. An impulse, — absurd, perhaps, but irresistible, — an impulse of my conscience, — forced me to my husband. I said to him: "I am a mother." To say that was to give him the right to kill me, or to drive me out. To force me to bring into the world a poor little creature without a name. Because he had been

so long a stranger to me. But he did not kill me, and he did not send me away. I tell you this, not because you are judging him, but that you may judge me. What could I do? Go away? Rebel? I was so young, — so weak, so helpless. I had to consider my mother and my little sister, Mariolina's mother, — who would be the innocent victims of this scandal. But I thought most of all of my child. I could not bring him into the world nobody's son. And so I resigned myself.

GIULIO. My mother!

BIANCA. One thing more. You were six years old. It was evening. Decio had dined with us, and we were in the salon. My husband, he and I. There was one of the usual discussions between my husband and me. You came running in, at the very moment when Ippolito said, "Very well, since you are in such a bad humor, I am going to the club. I leave you Decio. Perhaps your best friend will be able to calm you." He went out, slamming the door. You can not remember, Giulio; you were too young. But a little frightened at your . . . your — father, you fixed your great eyes on me and then on Decio, without saying anything. I called you to me. You hardly returned my kiss, and left without speaking to Decio. I felt as if my heart were ice. Your eyes fixed first on me and then on Decio! You could not understand. My reason told me

that was absurd. But you felt. So from that night I saw clearly, and I said to Decio, that for your sake, that you might not understand, our love must die, — must be changed into a calm affection. Henceforth, he was for me only a friend. Between us there was only one love, — you, Giulio, — our child. And Decio understood, too, and accepted it. We had to respect your innocence, and allow nothing to stain it. That day, I ceased to be a woman, and became only a mother. To live for you, — only for you, seemed to be the one way I could redeem my fault. I was young, and I was passionately in love. I must say that. For that is my excuse. And yet my sacrifice, my jealous care, has been of no avail.

GIULIO. Mother!

BIANCA. I have finished, my dearest. There is nothing more to say to you. Except this, — that my mother knows and has forgiven me. [*She sinks exhausted into a chair*] And now, beloved, I shall let you go. It is right. What you have said is the truth. We were blind not to have seen it before you. You shall go away. I owe you even this. I owe everything to you. Life! I gave it to you, — I give it back to you again. You shall carry it away with you. Yet, how shall I live here alone without you? I shall be like one dead. But that does not matter. *You* must live. You must make a life for yourself. The one

that I have given you was so, so unhappy. You shall go away. No, I won't cry. Look, I am smiling, I am happy, because I am still able to do something for you, — out of my own crushed heart. It is so little, — so little, — but it is all that I can do, my dearest son, my one beloved.

[*She leans over to kiss him, but her act is interrupted by the voice of Ippolito coming out of the garden. It startles all three.*]

IPPOLITO [*under Decio's window, in a low voice*] Decio! Decio!

[*Decio hesitates a moment, then with a rapid glance at Bianca and Giulio, goes to the window and opens it.*]

DECIO. Do you wish me?

IPPOLITO. Are you still up? Do you know it is almost midnight? You are ruining me, using up all this electric light.

DECIO. I am not sleepy, so I have been writing some letters.

IPPOLITO. Bianca and Giulio have gone to bed?

DECIO. I think so. We said good-night a while ago.

IPPOLITO. Well, everything is quiet. [*Whistles an air from "Friend Fritz"*] There is nothing left but to go to bed.

DECIO. I am going, too. Good-night.

IPPOLITO. Good-night.

[*The sound of a door closing is heard.*]

BIANCA [*coming close to Giulio*] Be at peace, my son. You shall go away.

GIULIO. Tomorrow we will speak of this again, and decide. We can not endure any more now. We are exhausted. Go and rest, mother. You can not bear any more. Let us go.

BIANCA. Yes.

[*Giulio goes to the window to see whether Ippolito has surely gone.*]

BIANCA. What are you doing? Don't show yourself.

[*Decio goes to window, then cautiously opens door and looks out.*]

DECIO. Nobody. The lights are all out.

GIULIO. Come, mother.

[*Bianca goes to door, then hesitates.*]

BIANCA [*in a thread of a voice*] I am afraid.

GIULIO. Of what? Of whom? I am with you. [*Puts his arm about his mother. Decio opens the door. Giulio and Bianca go out slowly. Bianca does not speak nor look at Decio; but Giulio, as he passes his father, touches him lovingly on the arm. When Bianca and Giulio have gone, Decio closes the door and leans against it, spent. A brief pause.*]

CURTAIN.

ACT THREE.

ACT THREE.

SCENE: *Same as Act I. A few days later. Morning of a beautiful September day. The room streams with sunshine. The piano is closed. Vases are filled with fresh flowers.*

Mariolina enters from the garden, with an armful of flowers. She is dressed in white and carries a wide straw hat. She comes in half running. When she does not see anybody, she stops. Looking about and seeing no one, she pauses undecided.

Enter Christina, left.

MARIOLINA. Ah, Christina.

CHRISTINA. Good-morning, signorina.

MARIOLINA. My aunt?

CHRISTINA. She is up now.

MARIOLINA. What kind of a night did she have?

CHRISTINA. She could not have slept much. All her candles were burned out.

MARIOLINA. I will go to her. I suppose I may see her?

CHRISTINA. Certainly.

[*Mariolina goes out the door, left, having placed her flowers on the piano. Christina crosses the room and goes out through the other door. Don Ludovico is ushered in by Maurilio. Don Ludovico is in traveling dress and carries a little old valise.*]

Don Ludovico. I am too early, but it does not matter.

Maurilio. Signor Ippolito is now out, but he will be here in time to say good-by. Signor Giulio has gone to say farewell to the old Marchesa. Signor Decio is still in his room.

Don Ludovico. Very well. I will wait.

Maurilio. Donna Bianca told me to tell her as soon as Don Ludovico came. [*Christina enters from the door at the back*] Christina, will you tell the Signora that Don Ludovico is here. [*Christina curtsies to Don Ludovico and goes out left*] Won't you put down your valise?

Don Ludovico. Thank you. I have to keep it under my eyes, or I would forget it. I am so little accustomed to travel. [*Sits down*] And so, Maurilio, Signor Giulio's last day has come. The house seems empty already.

Maurilio. It will not be gay. Don Ludovico, I still can not understand what has happened. In two days the house has utterly changed. And my poor lady!

Don Ludovico. Ah, but youth will have its way. It gets an idea into its head and will not be denied.

MAURILIO. But Signor Giulio has great courage to go so far, and to leave his mother alone.

DON LUDOVICO. Alone?

MAURILIO [*in a low voice, and as a privileged old servant*] Signor Decio leaves, too.

DON LUDOVICO. I know.

MAURILIO. And who knows if we will ever see them again.

DON LUDOVICO. What are you saying, Maurilio! Why, the signorino is just a sort of modern Columbus, setting out to discover a new world. In our time explorers always return. But it grieves you very much, doesn't it?

MAURILIO. I am sorry for Donna Bianca. She looks to me as if she were dying, God save her! And then I shall miss Signor Giulio. I was here before he was born.

DON LUDOVICO. I understand. I am very fond of this family, too, though I have known them only a few years. Splendid people! Splendid people!

[*Mariolina comes in from the left.*]

MARIOLINA. Good-morning, Don Ludovico.

DON LUDOVICO. Good-morning, Mariolina.

[*Maurilio goes out the door at the back.*]

MARIOLINA. My aunt begs me to excuse her. She has not finished dressing. She will be down as soon as possible.

DON LUDOVICO. And how is your aunt?

MARIOLINA. You can imagine. She is bearing up by sheer will power.

DON LUDOVICO. I understand.

MARIOLINA. If you will permit me, I will stay with you, Don Ludovico.

DON LUDOVICO. Delighted, — mademoiselle.

[*Mariolina sits on the divan.*]

MARIOLINA. Thank you.

DON LUDOVICO [*looking at her closely*] You seem downcast, Mariolina.

MARIOLINA. You don't expect me to be gay, — with this general flight? Why, it seems to me a dream. Only the night before last here we were. And you, too. We were not talking of anything special, were we? And in twenty-four hours, this voyage is decided upon. I have never seen anything like it. Giulio goes! Decio goes!

DON LUDOVICO. And I go, too.

MARIOLINA. But you will come back tonight.

DON LUDOVICO. No, — tomorrow.

MARIOLINA [*pointing to the valise*] Is that your luggage?

DON LUDOVICO [*lifting it up*] Rather antique. It was my grandfather's. I hope it won't disgrace your uncle's fine automobile. What do you think of it?

MARIOLINA. Oh, it is perfectly beautiful.

DON LUDOVICO. Do you know, this is the first automobile trip I have ever taken?

MARIOLINA. Do you call from here to Milan a trip?

DON LUDOVICO. For me, it is a voyage. I have never been in an automobile but once, and then I drove only around the square.

MARIOLINA. Were you afraid? Giulio speeded, didn't he?

DON LUDOVICO. I am not afraid of anything. I would go in an airplane if the Bishop would let me.

[*Mariolina remains with lowered eyes and says nothing.*]

DON LUDOVICO [*approaching her, lays his hand caressingly on her head*] Now, — now, — now! You must be gay.

[*Mariolina bursts into sobs.*]

DON LUDOVICO. Why, Mariolina, there is no reason to cry.

MARIOLINA [*broken with sobs*] Yes, I suppose I ought to laugh. What shall I do here without Giulio, — without Decio?

DON LUDOVICO. You have your grandmother.

[*Mariolina shrugs her shoulders.*]

MARIOLINA. Grandmother is old. She lives between her bed and the armchair. That is not exactly hilarious.

DON LUDOVICO. Then you have your aunt and your uncle.

MARIOLINA. It is bad enough to see my aunt now. I don't know what she will be like when Giulio is gone. [*Looking fixedly at Don Ludovico*] But I understand now.

DON LUDOVICO [*a little startled*] What?

MARIOLINA. Do you remember what aunt said about staying here always? She knew that Giulio would go away.

DON LUDOVICO. I shall be glad to have her here.

MARIOLINA. You are very selfish.

DON LUDOVICO. Perhaps I am, but you should not say it to your pastor.

MARIOLINA. Well, I don't think God ought to let some things happen.

DON LUDOVICA. His will is inscrutable.

MARIOLINA. That has nothing to do with aunt's letting Giulio go. I don't see why she does. Lucesia! The world is big enough already. We don't need to discover any more of it.

DON LUDOVICO. Instead of grumbling, you ought to be glad that Giulio is doing a fine and noble thing. Above all, you should be cheerful about it. Your Aunt Bianca needs a loving and gay companion.

MARIOLINA. Here is Decio. You can preach to him now. [*She goes over to the piano. Enter Decio, through the door at the back.*]

DECIO [*almost gayly*] Good-morning, Don Ludovico.

DON LUDOVICO. Good-morning, Signor Piccardi.

DECIO. All ready for the journey?

DON LUDOVICO. Yes. My baggage is here. [*He points out Mariolina.*]

DECIO [*turning round*] Oh, Mariolina. Good-morning.

[*Mariolina turns her back and does not answer.*]

DECIO [*going up to her*] Are you angry?

MARIOLINA. Yes.

DECIO. With me?

MARIOLINA. Yes.

DECIO. Why, I have just come in. What have I done?

MARIOLINA. It is all your fault.

DECIO. My fault?

MARIOLINA. Yes. Because if you were not going with Giulio, he would have to stay at home. What will *you* do there in Lucesia? Lucesia can't get on without you, I suppose. And you will catch cold, at your age.

DECIO. Thank you.

MARIOLINA. You deserve much worse than a cold. I should like to know why you are going, too.

DECIO. You can. When your Aunt Bianca felt it was right that Giulio should realize his dream, she asked me to go with him. She felt I would curb his daring, and recall her, waiting for him at home. I accepted with great pleasure, because I like adventure. And though I am old, I do

not catch cold. Most of all, I am going because it will reassure his mother. And you, mademoiselle, who love your aunt, ought not to be angry with me. Besides, it is all your own fault. Yes, it is. A day or two ago, I offered you my hand, and you refused it. So now, desperate, I flee to darkest Africa to forget.

MARIOLINA. How can you joke about it? What kind of heart have you? If you saw my aunt, you would not think it a laughing matter. [*She goes off, left.*]

DON LUDOVICO [*after a moment, in a low voice and in a confidential tone*] Yesterday morning early Donna Bianca sent for me.

DECIO. Yes.

DON LUDOVICO. She told me all, and asked my advice.

DECIO [*hesitatingly*] You did not know?

DON LUDOVICO. No. I have only been in this parish a few years, and I am Donna Bianca's friend, not her confessor. She did not confess now. People of intelligence and heart and conscience can confide very simply in a friend who is a priest. There are some good people among priests, you know. And four eyes see better than two. [*A short pause*] But I do not wish to make myself out more stupid than I am. I understood that there was a mystery in Donna Bianca's life, and divined what it was. I had heard what they said in your world, of Giulio, but I know that human

malice is great, and so I never dwelt upon the subject. Donna Bianca appeared to me a saintly creature, — a creature of faith, who did much good. A little unhappy, but an exemplary mother. That was enough to make me her friend, and to let me remember her in my prayers.

DECIO [*almost humbly*] Is it still enough?

DON LUDOVICO [*simply*] Yes.

DECIO. And your advice, Don Ludovico?

DON LUDOVICO. Donna Bianca did not need it. She called me through a natural need of unburdening herself in a moment of anguish. And, then, in what would she trust if not in the affection and esteem of her pastor? Her decision was already taken. She wished to know whether I approved.

DECIO. Do you?

DON LUDOVICO. Yes. She must and she should sacrifice herself in order to give peace to a young and troubled heart.

DECIO. Do you think the sacrifice of this poor woman will be of any use?

DON LUDOVICO. I hope so. Certainly we are face to face with an unusual case of conscience. There are many children situated as Giulio is, and many of them also know and are not at all troubled by it. For them the father is the man whose name they bear. They do not rebel against

it. If all, or the greater part, felt and acted like Giulio, we would have to consider whether the great reform timidly advocated by some solitary thinker, should not be put into practice. That is, all children belong to the mother. To the mother only, and bear her name.

DECIO. You mean the abolition of marriage?

DON LUDOVICO. Rather a transformation. But these are not the thoughts of a poor country priest. Let us come back to our own case. I confess that I can not find it in me to condemn Giulio. Instinctively, all my sympathy is for him. How exquisitely sensitive the boy is! Donna Bianca told me about his attitude toward her. What a generous heart he has!

[*Decio's eyes have brightened and he drinks in these words with the pride of a father. In an impulse of profound gratitude he offers Don Ludovico his hand. Don Ludovico withdraws his hand without appearing to reject Decio's. Decio is profoundly moved.*]

DECIO. I think we made a mistake. We should have denied it.

DON LUDOVICO. There are truths that we must not even attempt to deny. But, upon you, Signor Decio, devolves a hard and delicate task.

DECIO. Yes.

DON LUDOVICO. I advised Donna Bianca to have you go with Giulio.

DECIO. I am perfectly willing, except for the thought of leaving her alone.

DON LUDOVICO. It will be a comfort to her. I saw her poor eyes brighten at the thought. Your going with Giulio is a sort of security. It gives her strength to wait for him. But when you are far off, Signor Decio, you must complete your good work. You must induce Giulio to come back after a time, and to come back resigned and calm. To make him understand that resignation and silence are imposed upon him as the most sacred of duties, so long as his mother lives. Cure him. Convince him that it is not dishonorable for him to keep silence. The only dishonor would be to reveal this secret, or even to show that he knows it. To do so would be the most inhuman sort of vileness and the most horrible of vanities, — because that boy is the victim of an unusual and exquisite case of conscience. At the same time an indistinct and vague impulse of pride rules and guides his feelings and his acts. He is afraid to appear in the eyes of the world, either an idiot who does not know, or, worse, a cynic who does not wish to know. So he is tempted to cry out his secret to all the world. It is necessary to cure him of this, — that he may return the proud standard bearer of a new law. A law that perhaps will never be written,

but has no need to be written in order to be holy and human. Every man is the son of the woman who bore him in her suffering. The mother alone is sacred, and no child has the right to judge her, to absolve her, or to punish her. The child has but one duty, — to help, defend, protect his mother. And when you are far away, then you must say to this son, every hour, every minute, "Your post is there, with her. Neither Ippolito nor I really counts. We do not exist. We have no right over you nor over your heart. That is hers and hers alone. She has bought it at a bitter, bitter price." [*A brief silence*] I don't know whether what I have just said is exactly orthodox for a Catholic priest. But it does not matter.

Decio. I will tell him what you have said.

Don Ludovico. Not now! It would not be any use. He is in the acute stage of his crisis. You would irritate instead of convincing him. He must go away. It is necessary to let him conquer. In time his kindness and his affection will win. There in Lucesia he will be homesick, with the sweetest and strongest of all longings, — the longing for his mother. And then these things spoken by you. . . . [*A silence. He changes his tone*] You did not find it difficult to join this expedition?

Decio. Not at all. Galvani Scotti receives all well disposed people who offer themselves, and who are not fright-

ened by the hardships of the enterprise. A telegram written yesterday was enough to get a place for Giulio and another, half as a tourist, for me, since I will pay all my own expenses and will contribute to the general fund.

DON LUDOVICO. And your preparations?

DECIO. We have a day in Milan and two in Naples before embarking.

DON LUDOVICO [*after a slight hesitation*] And — here? No opposition? No — surprise?

DECIO. You mean Ippolito? None.

DON LUDOVICO. I must say that man is a queer riddle.

DECIO. Don Ludovico, if you lived in our world for one week, you would find many like him.

DON LUDOVICO. And never one word to his wife? Nor to you? Neither then nor since?

DECIO. No,—never. I have wondered about it for twenty years. He did not acquiesce through fear. He is not a hero. Yet he is no coward. Not for self-interest, because he is quite as rich as his wife. He was glad to have an heir,—otherwise he would have lost an inheritance from his uncle. But he was too rich to care much about that. Perhaps he has been silent through fear of scandal and love of peace. He likes a gay life, and he is a sensualist. He married Donna Bianca when she was scarcely more than a child,—through a caprice. He tired of her in six months.

He loves all women. That which happened gave him absolute liberty, without question, without trouble. It gave him full rights to do as he pleased, without causing any annoying change in his existence. With his mentality, which is not very great; with his conscience, quite sufficiently elastic, he accepted a pact,—not expressed, naturally, because he would not have stood that. Yet he did accept it, tacitly, as on our side we accepted it, with pain, almost with disgust. But neither the law nor the church permitted us anything better.

DON LUDOVICO [*after a moment's reflection*] Life is complicated, isn't it?

DECIO. A closed door, Don Ludovico! A closed door!

DON LUDOVICO. It is strange! If all three of you, Donna Bianca, Ippolito and you, had confessed to me, one after another, the one I would have absolved with the greatest reluctance would be—Ippolito. But don't tell that to anybody.

[*The door at the left opens. Bianca and Mariolina appear.*]

BIANCA. Have I kept you waiting, Don Ludovico?

DON LUDOVICO [*shaking hands*] No, indeed. How do you feel, Donna Bianca?

MARIOLINA. How do you suppose she feels? Poor aunt!

DON LUDOVICO [*trying to be gay*] You are becoming very headstrong, Mariolina.

BIANCA. Poor Mariolina, too. Good-morning, Decio.

[*Decio kisses her hand. Mariolina goes and gets the flowers she placed on the piano.*]

MARIOLINA. I brought you the flowers that you like, Aunt Bianca. Shall I put them in your room?

BIANCA. A few here and a few there, Mariolina.

MARIOLINA. Yes, aunt. [*She begins to arrange the flowers in the vases.*]

BIANCA. Giulio?

MARIOLINA. I met him going in to say good-by to grandmother. He will be here in a moment.

BIANCA. And everything is quite ready?

DECIO. Yes, Donna Bianca. We have been up since dawn.

BIANCA. Your things, too?

DECIO. I shall buy what I need in Milan.

MARIOLINA. They say Giulio's luggage is fascinating. I am going to look at it. May I?

BIANCA. Yes. That is splendid.

MARIOLINA. I will arrange the flowers afterwards. [*She goes out through the door at the back.*]

BIANCA. Don Ludovico, let me make one more request.

DON LUDOVICO. Yes, Donna Bianca.

BIANCA. When you see your young friend in Milan, — tell him I confide in him. The others do not need his help so much as I who stay. So tell your young friend about me, — about this poor mother. Ask him to write to me. To telegraph, if he can. [*Taking out a purse*] Look, here is some money. Give it to him, for his charities, and also for any expense on my account.

DON LUDOVICO. No, Donna Bianca. He does not need it.

BIANCA. I insist. It takes so much money to send a letter or telegram; — couriers cost so much. Please take it.

DON LUDOVICO [*taking the money*] If it will make you any happier.

BIANCA. Thank you.

[*Mariolina appears in the doorway.*]

MARIOLINA. Don Ludovico, there is an old man wishes to see you. He won't come in. It is a message to his son in Milan.

DON LUDOVICO. Thank you, Mariolina. I will see him now. Will you excuse me, Donna Bianca? [*She bows. Don Ludovico and Mariolina depart.*]

DECIO. You place all your trust in a stranger, — in this young priest. Have you no faith — in me?

BIANCA. I don't know. You are going and I must stay, — alone, — alone.

DECIO. Bianca, let me stay with you.

BIANCA. No.

DECIO. Look at me. . . . You are dying of grief. I will not go.

BIANCA. Decio!

DECIO. No! My love has never changed. You bade me stifle it. I have obeyed. But it is still there, to shield, to defend, to adore.

BIANCA. Stop!

DECIO. No. Hear me out. I will not go. Let Giulio have his way. He is safe without me. But you . . . We still are young, beloved. Let me take you away. Giulio will make his own life. Let us have ours at last, together. We, too, will go far away. Fulfill the old dream. Love that has lasted through all these years will last until the end. It has its rights. Come, and let me give you love, — let me give you peace. Let me be near to comfort, — to help you bear this parting.

BIANCA. No. Giulio parts us now as he has always parted us. We gave him life, — a terrible gift. We owe him everything. You, too, must put him before me. If we go away together, Decio, when Giulio comes home, — what? Never speak of this again. You must go, and I must stay, — alone.

DECIO. Bianca . . . !

BIANCA. Decio, — Decio! No, — no, — no!

[*Giulio is heard whistling merrily as he comes through the garden.*]

DECIO. Giulio . . .

BIANCA. Promise — always — and only — Giulio.

DECIO [*hesitates, — brokenly*] Yes.

[*Bianca walks to the bay window, trying to gain some self-control to meet her son. Giulio enters. He does not see his mother. He bursts in headlong, excited and happy. He is in traveling costume.*]

GIULIO. Here I am at last. Decio, is everything ready? I have telegraphed. Galvani Scotti expects us to be at the "Cavour" at noon.

BIANCA. Giulio!

GIULIO. Oh, mother, are you here? [*Goes toward her. Decio goes into the garden.*]

BIANCA [*coming down stage to meet Giulio*] Did you see grandmother?

GIULIO. Yes. I just left her.

BIANCA. What did she say to you?

GIULIO. Oh, a few tears. She expects you at dinner. She will send the machine at seven. Now, I must go out and lock the bags.

BIANCA. Wait a moment. [*Smiling at him a little*] Are you in a hurry?

GIULIO. No. It is ten o'clock. We must be in Milan at noon.

BIANCA [*imploringly*] Just one moment more, Giulio.

GIULIO. Two hours is not much to drive to Milan. [*Jokingly*] And I can't drive too fast, because it would frighten Don Ludovico.

BIANCA. Giulio, are you really going?

GIULIO. Mother!

BIANCA. Yes, — of course you are. Only it is so far away. I can not follow you even in imagination. Because it is a place I do not know. I can see you in Milan, — in Naples, — on the ship. And then, — nothiing more. Only a dark cloud that shuts you from me, — shuts you into the unknown.

GIULIO. Mother!

BIANCA. And I shall be here on the other side of the darkness.

GIULIO. Mother, — be good!

BIANCA. Yes, Giulio.

GIULIO. You know that it takes a great deal of courage for me to go. It has torn me in pieces. For two days and two nights I have done nothing except think, — "Shall I go? Shall I stay?" And it seemed to me that I ought to go. Tell me what to do, mother. There is still time

to change. Mother, my dearest mother! Shall I stay? Answer! Shall I stay?

BIANCA. No! Go! It is best for you. Oh, Giulio, it is not because you are going that my heart is broken. It is because I am the cause of your going.

GIULIO. Mother!

BIANCA. Ah, yes! Even if you stay, the reason of your going would still exist. It was born with you, and it will not die until your death. Even my death would not destroy it. Oh, if my death would only free you!

GIULIO. Mother! Mother!

BIANCA. Tell me that you forgive me.

GIULIO. Mother, are you mad? What are you saying?

BIANCA. Tell me that you forgive me. Tell me that you love me still, — even if it is not true.

GIULIO. If it is not true! [*Puts his arms around her neck*] Why, you are my mother. My mother that I love. And you are my saint. I bless you, and I adore you. [*Bends and kisses her hands.*]

BIANCA. My son!

GIULIO. Yes, you are my mother. Do you understand what that means? In my heart there is no one except you, and all my love is for you, for you alone. For me there is no one in all the world except you.

BIANCA. After all that has happened, Giulio?

GIULIO. Yes. Now and forever. And when I shall be far away, and you are here alone, just close your eyes and you will see me, and hear my words. They come from my heart, and my heart will always say them, wherever I may be, every hour, every minute.

BIANCA. My blessed.

GIULIO. Yes, through you, — by you. And I bless the day that I was born, — if my birth gave you one joy, and I bless the love through which I was born, if it gave you any joy. Nothing else counts. Nothing else exists. Nothing else has ever been. I am going away now because I have had a little crisis, and I must get over it. Just as if I had had an illness, and I had to spend a few months in a sanitarium. That you know and understand. But in our life, this is only a little pause. Think! They are going to found a city out there, and when everything is in order, it will be a beautiful country with a fine climate, and I shall come back for you. You will go out there with me. Only a dream? Well, let us dream a little, for dreams are good. And when we go out there together, we will take Mariolina, too. Tell me the truth. You planned to give her to me in a few years as my wife? Well, who knows? Now, I must not say anything, — but in a few years . . . Laugh, mother. Smile, at least. I want to see you smile. Smile at this lovely dream. We shall live

out there, — all of us who love each other, — all of those who respect each other. Out there, — alone. Mother!

BIANCA. Go, now, Giulio. You have made me almost too happy. Go. It is getting late.

GIULIO. Yes. It is late. [*He bends over to kiss her*] My dear mother! My beautiful mother! All mine! All mine! [*Very much moved, he goes toward the door. Don Ludovico and Decio come in. Giulio smiles at them and quickly goes out. Don Ludovico goes to Bianca.*]

DON LUDOVICO. Courage, Donna Bianca. Time will bring calm. The peace of duty accepted and fulfilled.

BIANCA. Ah, perhaps. But I do not feel it a duty. For me it is an expiation.

IPPOLITO [*from the door at the back*] Good-morning, explorer. The automobile is ready. If you wish to be in Milan by noon, it is time to see about your luggage.

DECIO. Giulio went to lock the trunks.

IPPOLITO. Very well. [*Lights a cigarette. Pause*] Decio, one thing rather serious I must say to you.

DECIO. Yes.

IPPOLITO. First of all — there is no use in going into the subject, — but I understand, and am grateful for what you are doing. Your going with Giulio will give peace of mind to my wife. I, too, will be better satisfied.

DECIO. Please . . .

IPPOLITO. I am not concerned about what the gossips will say of your sudden departure with Giulio. I have always made it a rule not to care about other people's comments. I know that the affair is a good thing for Bianca, and that is enough. But let us speak about the business end of this. . . .

DECIO. Business end?

IPPOLITO. Yes. Always when Giulio came home from his travels with you, I asked you for his expense account. You always refused, saying you were happy to make your young friend a little present. Giulio was a boy. That was all right then. But now he is grown. It is different. Bianca and I will send letters of credit to Naples for him. Separate accounts make good friends. You understand?

DECIO. Yes.

[*Enter Giulio and Mariolina.*]

GIULIO [*to Ippolito*] Good-by.

IPPOLITO. I will go to the automobile with you. Is everything ready?

GIULIO. Yes.

IPPOLITO. I am content to have you go. You are restless and need a change. But remember, your mother is home here, anxious and troubled. So miss no chance of sending her news of you. [*He goes out. Giulio goes to join his mother.*]

MARIOLINA. Don Ludovico, shall I take your bag?

DON LUDOVICO [*in a low voice, giving her his valise*] Don't you cry. [*They go out.*]

GIULIO. I shall not stay too long, mother.

BIANCA. Write at once. . . . Telegraph. . . .

GIULIO. Good-by . . . Mother . . . Mother . . . Mother . . .

BIANCA. Go, beloved.

GIULIO. Mother!

[*Decio comes forward and kisses Bianca's hands. All three stand locked together for a moment. Decio goes.*]

BIANCA. Go, my heart. . . . Go . . . Go . . . quickly . . . my soul!

[*Giulio goes out. The sound of good-bys, — the honk of an auto horn.*]

BIANCA [*wildly, as if the words are torn from her heart*] Decio! Giulio! Giulio! My son!

CURTAIN.

THE DEAD CITY

BY

GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO

English Translation by

PROF. G. MANTELLINI

INTRODUCTION

THE exalted, unselfish, universal spirit of Duse which has known no boundaries of culture in choosing the dramas for her repertory, no preferential frontiers in unfolding her art to the capitals of the world, whether all of them in their insularity were ready on first acquaintance to recognize and accept the gift she brought, is nowhere more graciously and serenely revealed than in her decision to include Gabriele d'Annunzio's "The Dead City" in the repertory of her farewell American tour under the direction of Morris Gest. D'Annunzio had grievously hurt her. But had there been any poets since him? There had not. Therefore, for the sake of Italy which nurtured them both, for the sake of the art of the theater which both of them had served, d'Annunzio must be represented.

The poet of "The Dead City" has been and still is the most amazing figure in the seven arts and the four estates of modern Italy. Poet, I say, for throughout his twenty-one contributions to the stage, he has never forgotten the alchemy of language, although, oftener than not, he has slurred and slighted the dramatic structure and stage-worthiness of his plays. Poet, novelist, classic scholar, amateur archæologist, amateur statesman, amateur warrior, he has been in the theatre for a quarter of a century, though not always of it. Lured thither largely by the stimulus of writing to fulfill the challenge of Duse, he has lavished on play after play, in both the Italian and French languages, the torrential and consuming passion of an imagination akin to that of the Hellenic Golden Age and that of the Renaissance, set paradoxically in modern times. By the sheer force of his word pictures, his mastery of imagery and his instinctive insight into the elemental passions and emotions, he has been able to defy the realistic trend of modern

literature, drama and life, and to revive the magnificence of ages long forgotten.

In the words of his countryman, Benedetto Croce, "Is he a constructive thinker and a sage? Is he a profound and coherent philosopher? A good counselor? No. But he is a poet and that ought to suffice; the more so that this species of poets by divine right is rarer than that of the sages, the reasoners, and the good counselors."

"The Dead City" was one of the earliest of d'Annunzio's dramatic compositions, dating back to 1898 and preceding those which are perhaps better known, "La Gioconda," "Francesca da Rimini" and "The Daughter of Jorio." Anna, the blind woman, is, of course, Duse's rôle; in the words of the translator of this version of the play, Professor G. Mantellini, "a part of renunciation; the part of a resigned soothsayer, as in 'La Gioconda'; her task, as the poet Gabriele d'Annunzio expresses it, 'is to speak of all the beautiful things in the shadow of an antique statue.' And Duse speaks of these beautiful things with the sweetest music of her voice, which encircles the beautiful phrases, as precious gems in a golden setting, and makes them glitter in all their splendor."

THE EDITOR

CAST OF CHARACTERS.

ALESSANDRO.
LEONARDO.
ANNA.
BIANCA MARIA.
NURSE.

In Argolis "the thirsty" — near the ruins of Mycenæ "rich of gold."

Play copyrighted, 1902, by W. H. Lee.

ACT ONE.

A large, light room, opening upon a loggia (piazza) with a balustrade, looking toward the ancient city of the sons of Pelops. The floor of the loggia is higher than that of the room by five stone steps built in shape of a truncated pyramid, as at the entrance of a temple. Two Doric columns support the architrave. Through the opening is seen the Acropolis with its venerable Cyclopic walls broken by the Gate of Lions. In each of the side walls of the room there are two exits leading to the interior apartments and to the staircase. A large table is covered with papers, books, small statues and vases. Everywhere, along the walls, into the empty spaces, are crowded statues, bas reliefs, inscriptions, sculptural fragments: evidences of a remote life, vestiges of a vanished beauty. The presence of all these white objects gives to the room a brilliant and severe, almost sepulchral aspect, in the immobility of the morning light.

[*Anna, seated on the highest of the steps leading up to the loggia, her head resting against the shaft of a column, listens in silence to Bianca Maria, who reads to her. The Nurse is seated on a lower step, at the feet of the listener, in a listless attitude, like a patient slave. Bianca Maria is standing, her back against the other column, dressed in a kind of tunic, simple and harmonious like a peplum. Holding in her hands an open book — Sophocles' "Antigone,"— she reads with a slow and grave intonation, in which trembles now and then a vague uneasiness, that does not escape the notice of the hearer. The signs of her disquietude and anxiety rouse the latter's attention more and more.*]

BIANCA MARIA [*reads*]

"O Eros, invincible in strife,
Eros, thou who hurlest disasters,
Who in the soft cheeks
Of the maiden liest in ambush,
Who roamest beyond the sea and through the rustic cottages!
Neither any among the Immortals can escape thee,
Nor any of the short-lived mortals; and whoever has thee is mad.
Thou drivest the misguided minds
Of the just to ruin;
And thou hast also to this strife
Incited blood relations.
The seductive glance from the eyes of a lovely bride
Wins the victory over the greatest laws.
Even I am being carried beyond the pale of the law
Seeing this; nor can I restrain
Any longer the fountains of my tears
Seeing Antigone on her way to
The nuptial chamber that quiets all.

"Antigone.

"Behold me, O citizens of my native country,
Entering upon the last journey,
Looking at the splendor
Of the sun for the last time,
And henceforward never again! Hades, that stills everything, conducts me
To the shore of Acheron alive
And deprived of marriage.
The nuptial hymn shall never be
Sung for me; for I am to espouse Acheron . . . "

[*The reader stops as if suffocating. The book shakes in her hands.*]

ANNA. Are you tired from reading, Bianca Maria?

BIANCA MARIA. Perhaps a little fatigued. . . . This dying spring is so hot that it causes weariness and suffocation like mid-summer. . . . Do you not feel it too, Anna? [*She closes the book.*]

ANNA. Have you closed the book?

BIANCA MARIA. I have closed it. [*A pause.*]

ANNA. Is there much light in this room?

BIANCA MARIA. Yes, very much.

ANNA. Is the sun shining on the loggia?

BIANCA MARIA. It is descending on the column, and is about to touch your neck.

ANNA [*lifts one hand to feel of the column*] There it is, I feel it. How warm the stone is! I seem to touch a living thing. . . . Are you in the sun, Bianca Maria? Once upon a time, when I faced its rays with my dead eyes, the eyelids open, I used to see something like a red vapor, scarcely perceptible, or at times a sparkling similar to that issuing from the hard flint, almost painful. . . . Now, nothing any more: perfect darkness.

BIANCA MARIA. And your eyes are ever beautiful and clear, Anna; and in the morning they are full of freshness, as if sleep were dew for them.

ANNA [*covers her eyes with both hands, resting her elbows on her knees*] Ah, the waking, every morning, what a horror! Almost every night I dream that I can see, dream that by a miracle sight has been granted to my eyes. . . . And to awake always in darkness, always in night. . . . Of nearly all things I have a recollection, of the things I saw when still in the light; I remember their shapes, their colors, their most minute particulars; and their perfect pictures rise for me out of the darkness, as soon as I touch them with my hands. But of my own person I have only a confused recollection as of one dead. A deep shadow has fallen upon my image; time has effaced it, as it effaces in us the pictures of those who have departed. My own image has vanished from me like the images of my beloved dead. . . . Every effort is in vain. I know well that the vision I finally succeed in calling up, is not my true self. Ah, how sad! You tell her, nurse, how many times I have asked you to conduct me before the mirror. There I remained with my forehead against the glass — to recollect, held by I do not know what insensate expectation. . . . And how many times do I even press my hands against my

face — as at present — to obtain its imprint in their softness. Ah, at times I seem truly to bear imprinted in my hands my faithful mask, like those copied in plaster from the dead; but it is a mask without life. [*Slowly she uncovers her face and stretches forth her hollow hands*] Do you realize the horror of such sorrow?

BIANCA MARIA. How beautiful you are, Anna!

ANNA. Last night I had a dream, strange, indescribable. A sudden old age seized all my limbs; I felt over all my body the lines of wrinkles; I felt my hair falling from my head upon my lap in large masses, and my fingers were interlaced like loose straw; my gums were toothless, and my lips were drawn in over the gums, and everything in me had become shapeless and miserable. I was like an old beggar woman whom I used to know, a poor idiot whom I used to see every day before the garden fence when I was still at home, and my mother was yet alive. Do you remember her, nurse? She was called Simona, and always mumbled the same song, hoping to make me smile. . . . It was a strange dream! And it corresponds to a painful sensation that I have at times, when I listen to my life slipping by. . . . In silence and in darkness, at times, I listen to my life hastening by with a roar so terrible, Bianca Maria, that I would gladly die to hear it no more. Ah, you cannot understand!

BIANCA MARIA. I understand, Anna. Even in the light, the passing hour imparts to me at times an almost unbearable anxiety. It seems that we are waiting for something that will never happen. Nothing has happened, for a long time.

ANNA. Who knows! [*A pause*] I do not feel the sun any longer.

BIANCA MARIA [*turning toward the loggia and looking at the sky*] A cloud is passing, but a light one: a golden cloud in the shape of a wing. Every day the clouds float through the azure sky — arising below, from the Gulf of Argos, and moving toward Corinth. I see them form and pass away. Some of them are marvelous. Sometimes they remain long upon the horizon, and in the evening glow like

funeral pyres. Yet none of them lets fall a drop of water. All the country is thirsty. Yesterday pilgrims set out from Carvati for the Chapel of the Prophet Elijah, to pray for rain. Everywhere there is drought; and the wind carries the dust of the sepulchers to a great height.

ANNA. You do not love this country, do you, Bianca Maria?

BIANCA MARIA. It is too dreary. Sometimes it seems to me almost frightful. When my brother and myself, for the first time, came up to Mycenæ, two years ago, it was the dawning of a burning August day. The plain of Argos behind us was a sea of flame. The mountains were tawny yellow and as savage as lions. We ascended on foot, silent, astonished, almost without breath, and with blinded eyes. From time to time an eddy would rise from the edge of the path, a column of dust and withered grasses, and follow us noiselessly with the step of a phantom. Seeing it approach I could not repress an instinctive shudder, as if those mysterious shapes could renew the terror with which the ancient crimes had inspired me. Upon the edge of a big ditch Leonardo picked up the skin of a snake and said in jest, "This was in the heart of Clytemnestra," and wound it around my hat like a ribbon. Before my eyes the little shining tail swung back and forth with the rustle of a dry leaf. A horrible thirst burned my throat. We looked for the fountain of Perseus in the valley below the citadel. So great was my weariness that as soon as I put my hands and lips into the cool water, I fainted. When I recovered my senses, I appeared to be in dreamland, out of this world, as though after death. The wind raged and eddies of dust pursued each other upon the height, disappearing before the sun, which seemed to devour them. A boundless sadness fell upon my soul; a sadness never before experienced, never to be forgotten. I thought I had come to a place of exile, from which there was no return; and everything assumed, in my eyes, a funereal aspect, which gave me a vague but painful presentiment. . . . I shall never forget that hour, Anna! But Leonardo, full of hope and courage, supported me and dragged me along.

He was sure of finding his princes, the Atridae, intact in the buried sepulchers. He said to me, laughing: "You look like the virgin Iphigenia on the point of being dragged to the sacrifice!" But his gayety and confidence did not bring back my courage. . . . You see, Anna, that every day his expectation has remained a delusion. This malignant soil that he turns over without rest, has given him so far only the fever that consumes him. If you could see him, Anna, you would feel uneasy. . . .

ANNA. It is true. His voice at times is like a smothered flame. Yesterday, feeling his emaciated, parched hand, I thought he was ill. He was standing next to me when you entered; he trembled like a man in fear. While you were there, I felt him quiver from time to time, as if your words made him suffer. I have a very singular intuition about such things, Bianca Maria. My eyes are closed to my soul, but it hears. It heard yesterday those poor nerves that were suffering, ah, so much pain. I wanted to speak to you about this, Bianco Maria.

BIANCA MARIA [*with evident anxiety*] Do you believe that my brother is really ill?

ANNA. Perhaps he is only tired. His strength is exhausted. His idea torments him like a passion. Perhaps he does not sleep. Does he?

BIANCA MARIA. I do not know, Anna. Some time ago he abandoned the room where he formerly slept, next to mine. Before that, I knew that his sleep was a profound one from his calm breathing. Now he is farther away.

ANNA. Perhaps he does not sleep.

BIANCA MARIA. Perhaps. His eyelids are inflamed and red. But he lives continually in the midst of that irritating dust; he is always there, bending over, groping in the ruins, digging up the relics, breathing the exhalations from the sepulchers. Oh, what a terrible will power he has. I am certain that he will not take any rest until he has wrung from the earth the secret that he is seeking.

ANNA. He seems to have a secret himself.

BIANCA MARIA. What secret?

ANNA. Who knows! [*A pause.*]

BIANCA MARIA. For some time he has been greatly changed. He was so loving to me, once. I was everything to him, the only companion of his youth. How often have I seen him tired, but not as he is now. He laid his very soul upon my knees, like a child. But no longer. When I go near him he seems to shrink into himself. Formerly, when the intenseness of his thought made his head ache, he would wish me to hold my fingers upon his temples to quiet the painful throbbings, and he was grateful to me, as for a delightful medicine. But no longer. He seems to avoid me. You said, Anna, that my words yesterday made him suffer. . . .

ANNA [*with a very pointed inflection*] Perhaps he feels that there is a change in you, Bianca Maria.

BIANCA MARIA [*troubled*] In me?

ANNA [*with the same inflection*] Perhaps he divines the cause of your melancholy and is worried by it.

BIANCA MARIA. The cause of my melancholy?

ANNA [*veiling the pointedness of her question*] You do not like this country, and you desire to depart.

BIANCA MARIA. I am, now and ever, obedient to his will.

ANNA. There is the sun again. Your cloud has vanished. How warm it is! Almost scorching! Give me your hand, please, Bianca Maria. Help me to rise and descend. [*Bianca Maria extends her hand, raises Anna and leads her down the steps. Anna, still holding her hand in her own and drawing near to her as if to listen to the palpitation of her heart, asks suddenly*] Did you see my husband this morning before he went out?

BIANCA MARIA [*hesitating an instant*] Yes, I saw him, together with my brother.

ANNA. Do you know where he has gone?

BIANCA MARIA. He had his horse saddled and took the road to Argos, alone.

ANNA. He has not cared for his work for a long time. He is absent many long hours; when he returns he is silent. Do you remember, Bianca Maria, the first weeks after our

arrival? Do you remember his ardor? He, too, like Leonardo, had great treasures to discover; but they were in his own soul. It seemed as if this land had, above all others, the power to exalt his mind. The flow of poetry was so abundant in him that he would pour it out continually, almost with every word. Do you remember? Now he is taciturn and absorbed.

BIANCA MARIA [*almost with trepidation*] Perhaps he is meditating some grand work. Perhaps he carries in him the weight of some great idea still unshaped. His genius may be about to give life to some marvelous creation.

ANNA. He speaks freely with you, Bianca Maria. Has he not revealed anything to you?

BIANCA MARIA [*always with slight excitement in her voice*] What could he reveal to me that he has not already revealed to you, dear Anna? You are so near to his soul, so near!

ANNA. I am near to his soul as a beggar is near a door. Perhaps he has no more to give to me.

BIANCA MARIA [*sweetly*] Why do you say such things? I see his eyes when they turn toward you. His look repeats constantly that he has nothing dearer, and that he finds nothing more beautiful. . . . How beautiful you are, Anna!

ANNA. You seem to wish to console me for something that I have lost. . . .

BIANCA MARIA. Why do you say such things?

ANNA [*listening*] Do you hear? Alessandro is returning. Look, nurse, from the loggia, and see if he is coming.

[*The Nurse, who has remained seated upon the steps, inactive, all this time, rises and ascends to the loggia to look out.*]

NURSE. There is no one on the road.

ANNA. It seemed to me that I heard the steps of the horse. Perhaps he is still at some distance. It is late.

BIANCA MARIA. From the window of my room I can see the entire road to Argos. I am going to see if he is on the way. [*Exit through the second door to the right.*]

[*The Nurse approaches Anna, who has covered her face with her hands.*]

ANNA. I feel like weeping, nurse. [*The Nurse takes her hands to kiss them.*]

NURSE. What has my daughter on her heart?

ANNA. I do not know. Something that presses like a knot; and then . . . a vague fear . . .

NURSE. Fear?

ANNA. Oh, I do not know. . . . Let me sit down. . . . Stay near me! [*She sits down. The Nurse kneels at her feet. She suddenly bends her head toward The Nurse*] Look, nurse, if you can find any white hairs. I must have some. Look well, nurse; here upon my temples; here upon the back of my head. Have you found it? Have you? Only one? Many? Are there many?

NURSE [*who has put her fingers into her hair*] Not one.

ANNA. Not one, really? Are you telling me the truth?

NURSE. Not one.

ANNA. I am still young? Tell me, am I still young? Tell me the truth!

NURSE. So young, indeed.

ANNA. Tell me the truth!

NURSE. Why should I deceive you? You are as white as these statues. No woman is as white as you are.

ANNA. It is true. So Alessandro told me the first time he spoke to me, long, long ago. Ah! That is why I became blind, like the statues! . . . What did Bianca Maria say about my eyes just now? Look at my eyes, nurse, are they not like two opaque stones?

NURSE. They are as clear as two crystals.

ANNA. They are dead, nurse; they are without sight. Do they not cause you a slight shudder, when they are fixed upon you? Do they not frighten you a little? Tell me the truth?

NURSE. Ah, stop! They are still alive — still alive! Some day, suddenly, through the grace of God, they will recover the light they have lost.

ANNA. Never more! Never more!

NURSE. Some day, suddenly: perhaps to-morrow. . . .

ANNA. Never more! Never more!

NURSE. Who knows the will of the Lord? Why should the Lord have left your eyes so beautiful if he had not wished to illumine them once more?

ANNA. Never more!

NURSE. If truly hope were dead, why should my heart tremble every morning when you call me? Why should I turn toward you with the same expectation every morning when I open the window of your room, to let in the light?

ANNA [*with a deep sigh*] If it might be!

NURSE. You also, do you not dream every night that sight has returned to your eyes?

ANNA. Oh, dreams!

NURSE. Believe in dreams! Believe in dreams!

ANNA. Here comes Bianca Maria. Go, go, nurse.

[*The Nurse kisses her hands, rises and goes out of the second door at the left, on her lips a silent prayer.*]

[*Reënter Bianca Maria.*]

ANNA. Is Alessandro coming?

BIANCA MARIA. I saw no one on the road from Argos. In the distance I noticed a cloud of dust; but it was a herd of goats. He may be coming back across the fields. May be, he went down to the fountain of Perseus. [*She ascends the steps and looks from the loggia, between the columns, toward the sun*] The work is at white heat in the Agora. Yesterday they found five funeral strata, sure indications. A great cloud of dust arises from the enclosure. It is a reddish dust; in the sun it seems to burn. Ah! It seems as if it must penetrate the blood like a poison. I am sure Leonardo is there on his hands and feet, lying prostrate, digging with his own hands. He fears that the blow of an iron might break fragile things. [*She turns towards the blind woman*] If you could see how tenderly he takes every fragment out of its coat of earth. Looking at him one would think that he was about to peel a precious fruit, and that he feared to lose a drop of its juice. . . . [*A pause. She descends toward the blind woman, with a swift gliding motion, keeping in the rays of the sun*] Would you like,

Anna, to eat a sweet-scented orange? Would you like to be in a Sicilian garden?

ANNA [*making a gesture in the air as if to draw the young girl to her*] What a strange voice comes from your lips, Bianca Maria! It seems like a new voice, as of one who was asleep and who suddenly awakens. . . .

BIANCA MARIA. Does my wish astonish you? Would you not like to have a basket of fruit in your lap? Ah, with what greed I would eat! At Syracuse we used to walk through the orange groves, looking through the boughs at the glittering sea; the trees bore upon their branches the ripe fruit and the new blossoms, the petals fell upon our heads like a fragrant snow; and we bit into the juicy pulp as one bites bread.

ANNA [*stretches out her hands again to draw her to her, while the other still keeps a little away*] It is there you would like to live. There, there is joy. All your being asks for joy, needs joy. Ah, how brilliant your youth should be to-day! The desire of living is radiating from your person like the heat of a fire-place. . . . Let me warm my poor hands!

BIANCA MARIA [*approaches her and sits at her feet upon a low stool. As soon as Anna touches her cheeks she has a visible shiver*] Why are your hands so cold, Anna?

ANNA. Your entire face throbs like a violent pulse.

BIANCA MARIA. The sun has set me on fire. In there at my window I kept watching in the sun. The stone of the sill was almost burning. Here, too, the whole room is now flooded by the sun. The sunshine reaches as far as the feet of Hermes. We are sitting on the bank of a golden stream. Stoop down a little.

ANNA [*touching her vaguely upon the face and hair*] How you love the sun! How you love life! I heard Alessandro tell you one day, that you resembled Victory, unlacing her sandals. I remember — at Athens — in marble as fine as ivory, a delicate and impetuous figure, which gave one the desire to fly, to soar through the air forever. . . . I remember: her small head stood out from the curve of her wings, which hung in repose from her shoulders.

Alessandro said that the impatience to fly was expressed in every fold of the tunic, and that no other statue represented more vividly the gift of divine swiftness. . . . We lived for a time in the enchantment of that youthful grace. Every day we ascended to the Acropolis to look at it again. Is it true that you resemble her, Bianca Maria?

BIANCA MARIA [*troubled by the strange manner of the blind woman who continues to touch her*] I have no wings. You look for them in vain!

ANNA. Who knows! The wings invisible are the ones that fly the furthest. Every virgin can be a messenger. . . . [*A pause. She continues to finger Bianca Maria, who makes an involuntary movement as if to draw away*] Will you not allow me to touch you? I feel that you are beautiful, and I would like to picture to myself your beauty. Are my hands repulsive to you?

BIANCA MARIA [*takes her hands and kisses them*] No! No! Anna. But I cannot tell you the sensation they give me. It seems as if your fingers could see. . . . I do not know. It is like a gaze that persists, that presses. . . . Each of your fingers is like an eye that opens. . . . Ah, your whole soul seems to descend to the extremities of your fingers, and your flesh seems to lose its human qualities. The color of these veins is unspeakably . . . [*She places her lips upon the hollow of Anna's left hand, trembling*] Do you not feel my lips upon your soul?

ANNA [*in secret despair*] They burn, Bianca Maria. They are as heavy as if all the wealth of life was gathered in them. How tempting must your lips be! All the promises, and all the persuasions must be in them.

BIANCA MARIA. You disturb me. . . . My life is bounded by a narrow circle, perhaps forever. I was reading to you awhile ago the *Antigone*. From time to time I seemed to be reading my own destiny. I, too, have consecrated myself to my brother. . . . I, too, am bound by a vow!

ANNA [*with passionate and anxious tenderness*] The forces of your life are too grand to be consumed in sacrifice. You must live. . . . You must rejoice, bite the fruit, pluck

flowers, dear soul. I seem to feel in you a glowing fire. All your blood beats in your face so strangely. . . . O, I have never felt such a strong pulsation. . . . Your heart. . . . Your heart. . . . [*She searches for Bianca Maria's heart, bending down to listen to its beating. She speaks in a low, almost mysterious voice the following words*] It is terrible, your heart. . . . It seems to want the whole world. . . . It is wild with eagerness.

BIANCA MARIA. Oh, Anna! [*She trembles and shrinks away from the hands of the blind woman as from slow torture that enervates and exhausts.*]

ANNA. Do not tremble! I am like a dead sister of yours returned from the grave. Once my blood, too, beat so; and my desire, too, toward the immensity of life was boundless. I know what you dream, what you suffer, and what you expect. . . . There is, there is happiness on earth; there hangs over every head the hour of joy. You devotedly follow your brother who lives amid ruins, and digs in sepulchers; but you cannot renounce your hour. An imperious force has suddenly risen within you. You cannot repress it any longer. If you should succeed in cutting off its stem, a thousand sprouts would rise from its roots. You must yield. [*Bianca Maria hides her face in the lap of the blind woman and remains in this position, trembling*] Do not tremble. I am like a dead sister of yours, who watches over you from beyond. Maybe, I am for you like a shadow; I am in another world. You see what I do not see. I see what you do not see. Therefore, you feel separated from me by an abyss. You cannot yield your soul to mine as you yield your head to my lap. Is it not so? [*She puts her hands upon the hair of the reclining girl, caressing it; then she drops them*] How much hair! How much hair! It is soft to the touch, like running, tepid water. How much! How much! It is marvelous! If it should come down, it would cover you to your feet. Ah, it is coming down! [*The loosened hair falls upon the shoulders of Bianca Maria and down Anna's dress, in luxuriant waves. The hands of the blind woman follow its ripples*] It is a torrent. It covers you completely. It touches the ground. It covers

me also. How much! How much! It has a perfume, a thousand perfumes. A torrent full of flowers. . . . Ah, you are all beauty. . . . You have all the gifts! [*She puts her hands upon her temples, and upon her cheeks, convulsively, with a gesture of anguish, as if feeling lost. Her voice becomes veiled*] How could one who loved you renounce you? How could you remain in the shade? You who have been created to give joy! Some part of you was asleep in the depths, which now has awakened. Now you know yourself, do you not? I have watched your steps at times. You move as if in tune with an inner well-known melody. . . . Ah, if I myself could pronounce the word of happiness for you, Bianca Maria! [*Bianca Maria sobs, buried under her hair, suffocating*] You are weeping? [*She draws the hair against her eyelids to feel the tears*] You are weeping! You are weeping! Ah, woe to us! [*A pause. Bianca Maria sobs, always in the same position. Anna turns restlessly toward one of the doors. A great anxiety shows in her face as she hears a rapid step on the stairway*] Here is Alessandro!

[*Bianca Maria rises to her feet, her face hidden in her hair which covers her completely, trembling and terrified in the light of the sun.*]

[*Alessandro enters through the first door to the right, carrying a bunch of wild flowers in his hand, a little out of breath and heated. He starts back at seeing Bianca Maria in such a condition, and his confusion is apparent.*]

ANNA [*her voice calm and soft again*] Where do you come from, Alessandro? We have been waiting for you a long time. Bianca Maria, from her window, watched the road to Argos to descry your horse; but you did not appear. Where do you come from?

ALESSANDRO [*in a clear, ringing voice, with sober and simple intonation which reveals the strength of a spontaneous and deep feeling in everything he says*] I have been riding through the country at random. I crossed the Inachos, which has not a drop of water in it. . . . All the fields are covered with little wild flowers that are dying; and the song of the larks fills the sky! It is marvelous!

I never heard such impetuous singing. Thousands of larks, a countless multitude. . . . They flew up from everywhere, darting toward the sky with the speed of arrows; they seemed mad, vanishing in the light without re-appearing, as if consumed by their own song or devoured by the sun. . . . One fell suddenly at the feet of my horse like a stone, and lay there lifeless, struck down by intoxication from having sung with too much joy. I picked it up. Here it is!

ANNA [*stretching out her hand and taking the lark*] Ah, it is still warm. How soft and delicate its throat is. It was singing a little while ago! Look at it, Bianca Maria. [*Bianca Maria approaches timidly, embarrassed by her hanging hair*] You tremble. . . . She feels ashamed of her hair, Alessandro. She was sitting near me just now, when it became unfastened in my hands, and suddenly inundated me. . . . It is wonderful! She must be entirely covered by it. You see her! You see her! Are you standing in the sun, Bianca Maria? Give her your flowers, Alessandro! Give her your flowers!

[*Bianca Maria tries to gather her hair and coil it upon her head.*]

ALESSANDRO [*astonished and perplexed, but smiling, advances toward the girl*] Take these flowers, Bianca Maria. [*Bianca Maria holds out her hands, having gathered up her hair confusedly, and uncovered her face upon which appear the traces of tears*] You have been crying?

ANNA. She was reading *Antigone* to me, and suddenly the sadness of it overwhelmed her. . . .

ALESSANDRO. You wept for *Antigone!*

ANNA. Upon the steps of the loggia she was looking at the clouds of dust arising from the Agora; and the thought of her brother caused her anxiety. . . .

ALESSANDRO. You were reading the story of the watcher. . . . *Antigone* is never so beautiful as under that tempest of fiery dust in the arid plane, crying and imprecating over the naked corpse of her brother. Is it not so? Sitting upon a hill against the wind, so as to escape the odor of

the decomposing body, the watchers await with closed eyes the passing of the blinding tempest; and she, undaunted in the midst of the atrocious furnace, gathers the dust with her hands and throws it over the corpse. . . . Ah, I always see her thus! . . . She is not so beautiful and grand when she leads Œdipus by the hand, or when going to her death. Is she? I should have liked to be here when you read, Bianca Maria. I have never heard you read.

ANNA. Why not read a few pages more?

BIANCA MARIA. I have not the book.

ANNA. Did you leave it upon the window-sill?

BIANCA MARIA. I left it . . . I do not know where, Anna.

ALESSANDRO. Will you read to me some day?

BIANCA MARIA. Whenever you wish.

ALESSANDRO. Some day I should like to hear you read Sophocles' *Electra* in the shadow of the Gate of Lions.

ANNA. Ah, the invocation to light!

ALESSANDRO. Some day I should like to hear you read one of my poems.

ANNA. Which one?

ALESSANDRO [*with an air of uncertainty*] Which one?

[*A pause. A confused noise comes through the loggia. Bianca Maria rapidly ascends the steps and looks toward the Acropolis.*]

BIANCA MARIA [*growing excited*] They are the men in the Agora. They are shouting with joy. . . . Perhaps they have discovered a tomb; perhaps they have found the king. . . . Leonardo! Leonardo!

ALESSANDRO [*ascending to her side*] Do you see Leonardo?

BIANCA MARIA. No, I do not see him. . . . The dust hides everything; the wind is stronger. He must be there, on his knees under the dust. . . . Leonardo!

ALESSANDRO. Your voice cannot reach him. He cannot hear you.

BIANCO MARIA. They shout no longer. . . . Listen! [*Her hair is falling, disheveled, from the top of her head again.*]

ALESSANDRO. They shout no longer. We hear nothing more.

[*A pause. The two remain for a while near each other, silent. The wind blows Bianca Maria's hair toward Alessandro.*]

ANNA. It is strange, this silence. [*The two descend the steps, pensive. Suddenly Bianca Maria, feeling her hair pulled, utters a slight cry. The blind woman springs to her feet trembling. The dead lark falls from her lap*] Alessandro!

ALESSANDRO [*trying to laugh*] It is nothing, Anna. A little of Bianca Maria's hair caught in the setting of my ring and pulled out. . . . Did you feel any pain?

BIANCA MARIA. Oh, hardly any. . . . [*Laying the flowers upon a step, she tries to arrange her hair.*]

ALESSANDRO. Forgive me. I had not noticed. . . .

ANNA [*with simulated simplicity*] Bianca Maria's hair is so soft! Did you notice, Alessandro? I would like to have it always in my fingers, like a spinning woman. [*She approaches Bianca Maria unsteadily and leans upon her shoulder in a caressing way.*]

ALESSANDRO [*still trying to laugh*] Oh, I have never dared to touch it. The wind blew it toward me. The rape of the lock was an involuntary one; a few threads of silk to tie scattered pages together. . . . [*He tries to disentangle the hair from his ring*] But they are inextricable. What knots chance can tie!

BIANCA MARIA [*shivering*] Listen! [*A clamor is heard again*] They are still shouting.

ANNA. Some great sight. . . .

ALESSANDRO. Did you notice, Bianca Maria, how uneasy and anxious Leonardo was this morning? He seemed to be coming out of a nightmare. . . . Perhaps he had been visited in his dreams by the "King of Men," and had wakened with some great presentiment? Did not the ardor in his eyes pain you? I could not look at him without suffering. I thought of him constantly a long time in the fields. I hoped he would come to meet me: he would have heard the song of the larks and picked some flowers with

those fingers of his, which have known nothing but stone and dust for too long a time. Ah, it is a long time since he began to bend over the gray, hard clay! Fascinated by the tombs, he has forgotten the beauty of the sky. I must tear him away at last from that accursed spot. . . .

BIANCA MARIA. You alone can do it. You know what power you have over him.

ANNA [*in a low voice*] He is ill, very ill.

[*Bianca Maria looks at her with a shiver, frightened and dropping the bunch of flowers.*]

ALESSANDRO. Truly, at times, he has the looks of a man bewitched. The earth he digs in is malignant; it seems that exhalations of monstrous crimes still arise from it. The curse which weighed upon the Atridae was so horrible that it seems truly as if some dreadful vestige of it still remains in the dust which was once trod by them. I understand how Leonardo, who lives a most intense inner life, should be troubled by it almost to frenzy. I fear that the dead he is looking for, and does not discover, have been revived within himself, and breathe within him with the tremendous force infused in them by Æschylus, enormous and bloody as they appear in the "Orestiad," ever pierced by the sword and firebrand of Destiny. Ah, how many nights have I seen him enter my room and seat himself by my bed, with the book that made him sleepless! How many nights he has watched with me, reading those grand verses aloud, which wearied him like cries, too immense for human breath! With the touch of that accursed soil, every day, every day, he must feel his fever grow. All that ideal life with which he has nourished himself must have assumed in him the shape and the body of reality. I think that at every stroke of the pickaxe he must tremble through all his bones, anxious to see the face of an Atrides really appear, still intact, with the visible signs of the violence suffered, of the cruel slaughter. . . .

BIANCA MARIA. Listen! Listen! [*A new, prolonged clamor is heard. Bianca Maria, agitated, impatient, ascends to the loggia, and looks toward the Agora in the bright sunshine*] They have ascended the wall . . . two, three, four

men, upon the wall . . . they are shouting, shouting for joy. . . . They call to me, waving their arms. . . . Look! Look! [*Anna has grasped Alessandro's wrist tightly, and remains at the foot of the steps, wild with anxiety. Bianca Maria advances and leans over the balustrade shouting. At intervals, between her short phrases, she seems to take in the signs and some of the words of her brother, who is rapidly approaching*] Leonardo! I see Leonardo. . . . He is there, he is there. . . . I see him. . . . Now he is in the Gate of Lions; he is coming down running — all white with dust. . . . Some great event! Some great discovery! . . . Brother! . . . Ah! he falls down . . . he struck his foot against a rock. . . . My God! . . . He rises; runs. . . . Brother! . . . See him! See him! . . . The sepulchers. . . . He has discovered the sepulchers . . . all his sepulchers. . . . God be praised! . . . Ah, what joy, what joy! . . . My brother! . . . Here he is! . . . Here he is! He is coming! [*She descends to the room, runs to the door and opens it*] At last! At last! . . . Here he is! . . . He enters! . . . He ascends the stairs! . . . At last all is joy, all is joy! . . . Brother! Brother!

[*Leonardo enters by the first door at the right, white with dust and dripping with perspiration. His eyes are radiant in his almost unrecognizable face. His excitement prevents him from speaking; and his hands, soiled with earth and stained with blood, are trembling. The whole room is flooded with sunlight.*]

LEONARDO. The gold, the gold . . . the corpses . . . an immense amount of gold . . . all the corpses covered with gold. . . . [*His emotion suffocates him. Bianca Maria and Alessandro stand near him breathless, affected by the same excitement. Anna, standing alone and leaning upon the edge of the table, bends forward toward the voice of the newcomer.*]

BIANCA MARIA [*with pitying tenderness*] Be calm, be calm, Leonardo; take your breath again. Rest a minute! . . . Are you thirsty? Do you wish something to drink?

LEONARDO. Yes, give me a drink! I am dying with thirst.

[*Bianca Maria goes to the table, fills a glass with water and hands it to him. He drinks it with avidity, in one draught.*]

BIANCA MARIA [*trembling*] Poor brother!

ALESSANDRO. Sit down, I beg of you! Rest a minute. . . .

LEONARDO [*touching Alessandro's shoulder*] Ah, why were you not there? Why were you not there? You, you ought to have been there, Alessandro! The grandest and most wonderful vision that was ever offered to mortal eyes; an apparent hallucination; unheard of wealth; a terrible splendor revealed, all of a sudden as in a superhuman dream. . . . I cannot tell, I cannot describe what I have seen. A succession of tombs: fifteen corpses intact, one by the side of the other, upon a bed of gold, their faces covered with golden masks, their brows crowned with gold, their chests enveloped in gold; and everywhere, upon their bodies, at their sides, at their feet, a profusion of golden objects, — numberless as the leaves fallen in a fabulous forest: an indescribable magnificence, one immense, dazzling view, the most resplendent treasure that Death has ever gathered in the darkness of the earth, in centuries, in thousands of years. . . . I cannot tell, I cannot tell, what I have seen. You, you ought to have been there, Alessandro. You alone would have been able to picture. . . . [*He stops an instant as if oppressed by want of breath. All are eagerly watching his feverish lips*] In one instant this soul passed over hundreds, thousands of years, breathed in the frightful legend, palpitated with the horror of the ancient slaughter. The fifteen corpses were there, with all their members, as if just deposited after the killing, hardly burned by the fire extinguished too soon: Agamemnon, Eurymedon, Cassandra, and the royal escort: buried with their garments, their weapons, their diadems, their vases, their jewels, all their riches. . . . Do you remember, do you remember, Alessandro, that passage of Homer: "They lay between the vases and the decorated tables, and all the room was stained with blood. And I heard the lamenting voice of the daughter of Cassandra, whom the perfidious Clytemnestra stabbed at my

side . . ."? For an instant my soul has lived an antique and violent life. They were there, the murdered ones: the king of kings, the enslaved princess, the charioteer and the guests, — there, under my eyes for an instant, motionless. As vapor vanishes, as foam melts away, as dust is dispersed, like I do not know what unspeakably evanescent and fleeting thing, they all passed away in the silence. It seemed to me that they were swallowed by the same fatal silence that reigned over their radiant immobility. I do not know what happened. A mass of precious things remains there, a treasure without equal, the witness of a great forgotten civilization. . . . You will see, you will see!

ANNA [*very softly*] What a dream!

ALESSANDRO. What a glory! What a glory!

LEONARDO. You will see! The golden masks. . . . Ah, why were you not there, at my side! . . . The masks protected the faces from contact with the air, and the faces must have remained natural. One of the corpses, surpassing in stature and majesty all the others, was adorned with a large golden crown, with the armor, the belt and the golden spurs. Surrounded by swords, spears, poniards, and cups, covered with numberless golden discs thrown profusely upon the body like wreaths, more venerable then a demi-god. I was leaning over him when he vanished in the light; I was raising the heavy mask. . . . Ah! Have I not, in truth, seen the face of Agamemnon? Was he not the king of kings, perchance? His mouth was open, his eyes were open. . . . Do you remember, do you remember in Homer: "As I lay dying I lifted my hand toward my sword; but the woman with the dog's eyes went away and would not close my eyelids nor my mouth . . . at the moment when I was descending into the home of Hades"? Do you remember? The mouth of the corpse was open now, the eyelids were open. . . . He had a large forehead, ornamented with a round golden band; the nose was long and straight; the chin, oval; and when I raised the armor I thought I noticed the hereditary sign of the tribe of Pelops, "the shoulder of ivory." . . . Everything vanished in the light. A handful of dust and a mass of gold. . . .

ALESSANDRO [*astonished and dazzled*] You speak like one coming out of a hallucination, like one who is the prey of a delirium. What you say is incredible. . . . If you have really seen what you say, you are no longer a human being.

LEONARDO. I saw it, I saw it! . . . and Cassandra! How we loved the daughter of Priam, "the flower of the booty!" Do you remember? How you loved her, with the same love as Apollo! She pleased you, deaf and dumb upon her chariot, with her "look of a wild animal just taken," owing to the Delphic fire which was smoldering under her sibylline tongue. Many a night her prophetic cries have awakened me. . . . And she was there just now, supine upon a bed of golden leaves with numberless golden butterflies upon her garment, her brow bound with a diadem, her neck ornamented with necklaces, her fingers covered with rings; and a golden pair of scales rested upon her breast, the symbolic scales with which the destinies of man are weighed, and an infinity of golden crosses formed of four laurel leaves surrounded her; and her two sons, Teledamos and Pelops, wrapped in the same metal, were at her sides like two innocent lambs. . . . Thus I saw them. And I was crying to you aloud when she vanished. But you were not there! You will see her wrappings, you will touch her empty girdle. . . .

ALESSANDRO [*impatient and excited*] I must see, I must run. . . .

[*Leonardo holds him back with his hand, urged by an irresistible need of saying more, of communicating to others all his feverish excitement.*]

LEONARDO. Marvelous vases, four-handled, ornamented with little doves, like Nestor's cup in Homer; large heads of oxen, all of solid silver, with golden horns; thousands of plates wrought in the shape of flowers, leaves, insects, shells, octopi, Medusas, stars; fantastic animals of gold, ivory, crystal; sphinxes, griffins, chimeras; small figures of divinities with arms and heads loaded with doves; little temples with towers crowned with doves, their wings spread; lion-hunts and panther-hunts engraved upon blades

of swords and lances; ivory combs, bracelets, lockets, seals, scepters, wands. . . . [*While he pictures these splendors Anna lets herself fall upon a chair and covers her face with her palms, leaning forward, and her elbows upon her knees.*]

ALESSANDRO [*breaking away*] Let me go! Let me go!

LEONARDO [*rising, very loud*] I go with you. . . . Let us go!

BIANCA MARIA [*embracing her brother and beseeching him, her hair again falling about her*] No, no, Leonardo, I beg of you. Remain here a while, rest a little, recover at least your breath! You are too tired, you are exhausted!

ALESSANDRO. I am going, I am going! [*Exit by the door leading to the stairs.*]

BIANCA MARIA [*still holding her brother in her arms, compassionately*] Oh, how weak you are, my poor brother, my poor brother! You are wet through. . . . The perspiration is mixed with dust. . . . Your face is almost black . . . and those poor eyes, those poor eyes! How inflamed they are! Your eyelids are as red and swollen as if you had been weeping a whole year. . . . Do they not ache? Oh, how they must ache, poor eyes! I will give you a lotion I know, to lave them. You will take a rest, won't you? You will rest now that your wish is fulfilled. . . . You have covered yourself with glory; you were splendid a while ago when you entered, you were resplendent from all that gold. . . . [*Her falling hair almost covers him as she sinks against his breast. With infinite tenderness she wipes his brow, and his eyes, his cheeks, his neck with her hair; she enfolds him with her love. Leonardo appears as if repelled, rigid; with an extraordinary expression of pain and of terror upon his exhausted face of a deadlike pallor*] Let me wipe the perspiration away, let me. I cannot tell you the sorrow you cause me. . . . I do not know what to say to you to relieve your weariness, to calm your blood, to revive your color; I do not know what balm, what draught. . . . Ah, how many days, how many days you have spent there, prostrate upon the earth, in the excavations, swallowing that cursed dust, tearing your hands on the stones, without rest, without rest! Poor hands! They are all torn, stained with

blood, the fingernails split, almost without flesh, dry as flint. . . . Do they not ache? Poor hands! I will give you an ointment that I perfumed sweetly with violets — which will heal them in a short time, and make them as soft and white as they were once. . . . I remember. You used to have such fine and beautiful hands. . . . How you tremble! How you tremble! [*Anna suddenly lifts her head*] You must feel like dying with weariness. You have lived at such a tension, like a bow ready to break! Not a vein in you but trembles, and your muscles twitch like cords unstrung. . . . You are suffering, you are suffering! [*Struck by the remembrance of the words spoken by Anna, she stops with an expression of anguish. Then she takes in her hands her brother's head, looking sharply into his eyes*] You have nothing against me, have you? I have done nothing to you, have I? I have done nothing to cause you pain. Tell me, tell me, Leonardo! Answer!

LEONARDO [*in a faint voice, trying to smile*] Oh, nothing!

BIANCA MARIA. I never loved you as much as I do now, brother. My tenderness for you has never been so deep. You are my continual thought, you are everything to me. Take me where you will, to the most sterile desert, to the most desolate ruin; and if you smile and are contented, I shall be happy. I, too, will remain in the midst of the dust; I, too, will tear my hands upon the stones; I, too, will gather the bones of the dead; but you must smile, you must have a cheerful countenance. . . . Do you remember, do you remember? At Syracuse you used to sing in the midst of your work, and you seemed to have in your soul the beauty of the statue for which you were looking. I was picking the sweetest oranges to bring you; and you did not wish to eat them unless peeled by my fingers. Do you recollect? When you were tired you fell asleep with your head upon my knees, in the shadow of the olive trees; and I guarded your calm sleep, thinking of the statue you were trying to find. Ah, how long, how long have I not watched over your sleep! You must need an infinity of sleep. . . . You can no longer raise your eyelids. . . . Come, come to

your room! Let me help you. Let me be like a mother to you! You must sleep. You must have a long, deep sleep; you must have your soul clarified like tranquil water. . . . When you wake again you will see all the gold you have discovered, as at the bottom of your soul, and I will still be at your bedside. Come, come! [*He endeavors to draw away from the sweet embrace as if from unbearable torture*] I cannot bear to feel you tremble so! Come!

LEONARDO. I must go back there.

BIANCA MARIA. It is impossible. It is noon. Do you not see! The sun is shining everywhere, a sun that burns. . . . Have you not left your men up there?

LEONARDO. I must return, I must return!

BIANCA MARIA. It is impossible. You cannot go back there as you are. . . . You would fall on the way. . . . Listen to your sister! You look as if you were going to faint. . . . Let me support you! [*She presses him back and twines her arms about his shoulders, covering him tenderly with her hair. He looks deadly pale and desperate. Anna rises silently and moves toward them, listening, while they go out through the second door to the right. The room is flooded with sunlight.*]

[*Anna, alone, takes a few uncertain steps, oppressed by a deep gloom.*]

ANNA [*in a hollow voice, as if from within*] No one has spoken to me. I am in another life. . . . And all that funereal gold. . . . And that poor, trembling soul. . . . And all that sweet life that is glowing in the beautiful creature. . . . [*Her feet touch the bunch of wild flowers, which have fallen from Bianca Maria's hands*] Ah, the wild flowers he picked for her! [*She stoops, takes the whole bunch, buries her face in it and remains mute for a moment*] I would I could weep! [*She takes a few steps more*] Nurse! Nurse!

NURSE [*rushing from the second door to the left*] Here! Here I am. [*Takes one hand of the blind woman and kisses it.*]

ANNA. The hour?

NURSE. It is noon.

ANNA. Here, take these flowers and put them in a vase of water.

NURSE. They are all withered; they cannot revive.

ANNA [*letting the bunch fall*] Let us go. . . . [*While going out, guided by the nurse, she stops and turns around as if remembering something*] Ah, look around there, nurse, look on the floor. . . .

NURSE [*bends down to look*] What have you lost?

ANNA. Look there. . . . It is a dead lark!

CURTAIN

ACT TWO.

A room in the apartment of Leonardo. Along the walls, which are painted a dark red, stand large cases with several shelves, containing the treasures found in the sepulchers of the Agora; the jars, breastplates, masks, diadems, swords and girdles of gold, glitter dimly in the half-light. Upon two inclined tables shaped like biers, rich ornaments, which had covered the forms of Agamemnon and Cassandra, are arranged so as to produce the effect of the absent bodies. Some caskets filled with gold, and a few vases of brass containing ashes, are at the foot of the tables. A closed door is on the right side. In the background an open balcony looking toward the plain of Argos and the distant mountains. The hour of sunset approaches.

[*Bianca Maria is discovered arranging the marvelous objects. She stoops to take the necklaces, bracelets, combs, buckles and little idols from the caskets and arrays them upon one of the tables about the golden mask of the prophetess. Some spirals of golden thread hang between her fingers, small spirals which were used to fasten the hair around the head. She fastens them coquettishly in her own hair. Alessandro's voice is heard outside the door.*]

ALESSANDRO. Leonardo, are you there?

BIANCA MARIA [*trembling, hesitating*] My brother has just gone out . . . I do not know where. . . . [*She goes to the door and opens it. Alessandro appears on the threshold.*]

ALESSANDRO [*almost timidly*] Ah, you are alone . . . alone in the midst of gold . . . I was looking for Leonardo.

BIANCA MARIA. I do not know where he has gone . . . Perhaps he descended to the fountain of Perseus. . . . [*They avoid looking at each other.*]

ALESSANDRO [*making one step into the room*] Have you remained to watch the treasure, Bianca Maria? . . . What were you doing?

BIANCA MARIA. I was replacing Cassandra's jewels around her. See, that casket is full of them. I promised my brother that everything should be in order on his return at nightfall. . . .

ALESSANDRO. Do you wish me to help you? It is already late.

BIANCA MARIA. It is late . . .

ALESSANDRO [*advancing toward the relics*] Strange! There seems to issue from this gold an indistinct figure . . . The twilight, or a night lamp, could deceive the eye and re-create the entire form. Certainly, Leonardo is aware of this illusion. He must have seen more than once the vision of Priam's daughter.

BIANCA MARIA [*sighing*] Ah, his eyes seem to see nothing else but phantoms!

ALESSANDRO [*softly*] I am not less sad for his sake than you are, Bianca Maria. I was looking for him, hoping . . . Of late, when he is with me, he seems to be continually driven by an anxiety to reveal a secret to me. I allow silence to fall upon us, and wait, not any less anxious than he. His lips swell, they seem ready to open. But he abandons the idea, and they remain closed. I dare not question him, fearing to drag from him a word that his soul would not yet tell me. And we suffer together, silently. [*A pause*] What are you thinking of, Bianca Maria?

BIANCA MARIA [*shaking off her thoughts*] Will you not help me? My brother will return soon. [*She stoops over the casket and at that moment Alessandro looks at her.*]

ALESSANDRO. What have you in your hair? [*He approaches her.*]

BIANCA MARIA [*in confusion*] Ah, the spirals. . . . I put them on as an experiment. I wish to show them thus to Leonardo, who entertains some doubt about their former use. [*She starts to take them off.*]

ALESSANDRO [*with an unsteady gesture trying to prevent*

her, without, however, touching her] No, no. Why do you wish to take them off? Leave them where they are!

BIANCA MARIA [*attempting to smile*] I must restore them to the dead princess, whom you loved so much. . . .

ALESSANDRO. No, no! Keep them yet a while in your hair! [*In trying to prevent her from taking them off, he touches her hand lightly. Both are troubled. They look at each other with a sort of restrained violence. A pause.*]

BIANCA MARIA [*lowering her eyelids, softly*] You do not help me. . . .

[*A new pause. Both stoop over the caskets of gold.*]

ALESSANDRO. Look at the carving of this ring: a woman, sitting, holding three poppies, with three ambiguous figures standing before her, and upon her head a double-edged axe, and the brilliant disc of the sun. Look at this other: a young woman holding out her arms, turning her head backward; before her a man, also holding out his arms. Look: the woman has luxurious hair.

BIANCA MARIA. She turns her head backward. . . .

[*A pause. Bianca Maria continues to arrange the ornaments around the mask. Alessandro goes out on the balcony and remains looking at the landscape for a few instants. Both are struggling against the anguish that seizes them.*]

ALESSANDRO. This arid country has, in truth, the feverish aspect of thirst personified. Other lands soften and breathe when night approaches. This one tells of the torture of its thirst even at night. Up to the last gleam of twilight you see the beds of its dried-up rivers whitening dolefully. The mountains over there, do they not look like a herd of enormous asses, with their rigid backs rising one above the other? One feels that down behind Pontino the swamp of Lerna is steaming. Look how inflamed Arachnæus is. Almost every evening its summit is red, in memory of that fire which announced to the scouts of Clytemnestra the fall of Troy. From the mount of Ida to Arachnæus, what a long line of signal fires! We were reading again yesterday of the marvelous number of mountain pyres kindled by Victory . . . And now you may sift

through your fingers the ashes of him who announced his return by such signs! You wear in your hair the ornaments of the royal slave whom he chose from the spoils of war! [*He moves again toward Bianca Maria, looking at her*] And all that is simple, as you do it. The abyss of time is filled, between you, the living, and the belongings of the king and the prophetess, that are in your keeping. All this gold seems to belong to you from time immemorial, for you are Beauty and Poetry; and everything returns in the circuit of your breathing, everything falls naturally under your dominion. . . .

BIANCA MARIA [*pale and trembling, resting her back against the table of the golden relics*] Do not speak to me thus!

ALESSANDRO. Why do you not wish me to speak to you of the truth which you have revealed to my spirit? Do you not think, Bianca Maria, that to manifest internal truth, when it demands expression, is necessary for those who have resolved to live without suffering and without lying? How many times have we smothered in silence the unexpected things which were born in us, and rose to our lips! I cannot think of it without regret and remorse. I seem to see them undulating below the still water, sluggish and shapeless. And they might have grown in us, who knows into what new joys, new pangs, new beauties, meeting each other in the currents of our living voices. Ah, woe to the one who hides, who dissimulates, who smothers, who lies before life! Why have we remained up to this time without looking into each other's eyes? Were we afraid to read shame in our glances? Were we afraid to acknowledge by looks what we already knew?

BIANCA MARIA [*with anguish*] We know what cannot be and can never be.

ALESSANDRO. Ah, another prohibition to life!

BIANCA MARIA. We know that there are things stronger than death — to separate mortals Death could not separate us as these do.

ALESSANDRO. What are they?

BIANCA MARIA. You know. Sacred things.

ALESSANDRO. Ah, I would wither a thousand lives that your lips might drink, Bianca Maria!

BIANCA MARIA. Do not speak to me thus! . . . There is, near you, bound up with yours, a life far more precious than mine: a life almost divine. She is so penetrating that I have never been able to approach her without trembling in every vein. Nothing seems unknown to her, and nothing strange. Every time I have been able to force myself toward her, I have felt in her I know not what mysterious beauty that exalted and humiliated me at the same time. And I have never wept as I have upon those knees, with a weeping that gave me so much relief and so much pain.

ALESSANDRO. You do not know what terrible and unexpected sterility Time brings to the highest human union. The most powerful roots remain buried and latent below the ground; their subterranean force becomes inert forever, produces neither leaf nor flower. But do you not feel, when your life is near mine, a mysterious vibration that resembles the ferment of spring? Your presence alone is sufficient to give to my mind boundless fertility. When we were upon the loggia the other day, in the silence that followed the outcry, and the wind blew your hair toward me, my soul in a moment expanded beyond all bounds, encompassing an infinite number of new ideas; and the dust of the sepulchers was for me a flood of germs eager to sprout. We sit, one by the side of the other, in a desert far from the tracks of man, motionless and mute as the country at dawn, yet every breath of wind would waft to us marvelous germs.

BIANCA MARIA. In you, in you alone is all the power. . . .

ALESSANDRO. In you, in you are all those things which men mourn without ever having possessed them. When I look at you, when I hear the rhythm of your breath, I feel that there are other beauties to be revealed, other possessions to be conquered and that there may be, in this world, things one can do, as delicious as the sweetest dreams of poetry. I do not know how to tell you what I experienced

one day, standing beside you, at the first appearance of my love and my desires. It was an extraordinary feeling which I can describe only by analogy with a re-awakening of my distant adolescence. . . . I remember that re-awakening as a joyful birth, a glorious dawn in which I was born to another life, infinitely purer and stronger, and suddenly the hands of Destiny, firmly clasped around my head, were removed. I was sailing from Apulia toward the waters of Greece for the first time. It was in the Gulf of Corinth, in the Bay of Salona, at the anchorage of Itea where I was to land and ascend to Delphi. You know those places, you who have wandered over all the shores consecrated to Mystery and Beauty. . . .

Bianca Maria [*as in a dream*] Salona! I remember: an azure bay, with little hidden harbors like the cavities of shells, and pink like shells, in the evening. . . . Upon the caverned mountains, among the rocks, on some patch of reddish soil, waved a few meager ears of wheat, mixed in with tufts of aromatic herbs. . . . I remember: one evening the stubble fields upon one mountain caught fire. The light and serpentine flames ran among the rocks with the rapidity of lightning. I never saw such a quick and bright fire. The breeze carried to us the aroma of the burning herbs. All the sea seemed perfumed with mild mint. Thousands of frightened falcons circled above that fire, filling the whole sky with their cries.

Alessandro. There it was, there it was! I had fallen asleep upon the deck, my face turned toward the stars, that August night. The rattling of the chains awoke me at sunrise, when the ship had been made fast. You know, you know to what distance, even in our day, Parnassus extends the sanctity of its ancient myth. Your eyes, before which have passed the most beautiful and the most august visions of the earth, have certainly drunk in that ideal light which encircles the Apollinean mountain on summer mornings. Still recumbent I saw nothing but the fabled summits in the mute pallor of the sky; but from the shore came the chant of the cocks: a lively and proud chant in unceasing calls and unceasing answers, that alone invaded the

silence of the sublime solitude. Ah, never, never shall I forget the joyful promises that were made to my new life, in that place and in that dawn, by this inspiring chant! . . .

BIANCA MARIA. It is true! It is true! I remember. . . .

ALESSANDRO. Well, then, the extraordinary emotions of that far distant morning took possession of my spirit again in that generous hour in which I discovered the power that lies in you. Your lips were motionless, but from your very blood I could hear a song arise that renewed those old promises. Ah, I knew it! I knew it! I knew well that all the promises, sooner or later, would be fulfilled. For this I have waited confidently. I have waited for my spirit to obtain to perfect maturity that it might be capable of the supreme sweetness. I have enlarged its knowledge by every means that it might be better able to appreciate the greater value of every new gift. I have led it to every fountain, I have poured on it every fragrance, I have filled it with every essence, in order that, in its very fullness, it might feel more keenly its insatiable nature. And I waited, I waited! And you came like a messenger, you appeared on my path at the moment when I was turning back perplexed, assailed by uneasiness on account of the over-long delay. At other times I had looked at you, had listened to the sound of your voice; but in that moment you appeared like a new creature slipping suddenly out of a chrysalis that had hidden you. . . . Before, I had looked at you without seeing, I had listened to you without hearing. Now I recognize you, and you recall to me all the promises of that distant morning. I will not renounce one of them, even if I have to use violence to compel Destiny to fulfill them.

BIANCA MARIA [*writhing in agony*] Be silent, be silent! You speak as if intoxicated. . . .

ALESSANDRO [*without further restraining his ardor*] I need you, I need you! If ever the shapes I have given to my thoughts have appeared beautiful to you, if ever the words of my poetry have seemed comforting to you, if ever you have recognized any height in my intellect, I beg you, I beseech you . . . do not misjudge this impulse that urges

me toward you. My life in this moment is like a river swollen by the waters of spring, clogged with an uprooted forest, that cannot find an outlet. You alone are able to remove this impediment; you alone, with a blade of grass, with the stem of a flower in your little hand. . . .

BIANCA MARIA. Not I, not I! Your dream blinds you. . . .

ALESSANDRO. You, you alone! I have met you in a dream as I meet you now in life. You belong to me as if you were my own creation, made by my hands, inspired by my breath. Your image is beautiful within me, as an idea is beautiful in me. When your eyelids quiver, it seems to me that they quiver like my blood, and that the shadows of your eyelashes touch the very bottom of my heart. . . .

BIANCA MARIA [*as if lost*] Be silent! Be silent! I feel like suffocating. . . . Ah, I can live no longer, I can live no longer!

ALESSANDRO. You cannot live except in me, because you are in my life, as your voice is in your mouth. How long have I awaited you! With what faith have I awaited you! I do not ask what you have done in the years during which we remained strangers to each other, hidden from each other, invisible to each other, though at times together, though at times breathing under the same sky. I know it, I know it! You have immersed your soul in Mystery and Beauty, you have drunk Poetry at the most remote fountains, you have dreamed your dreams in the glory of the loftiest destinies ever accomplished. I know, I know what you have done that I might find the antique human soul present in the freshness of your love. . . .

BIANCA MARIA [*in utter confusion*] You exalt the most humble of all creatures with your breath. I have only been a good sister; everywhere I have carried my simple tenderness for my brother who labored.

ALESSANDRO. But did not another being live beside the good sister? She breathed upon the golden medals of Syracuse scarcely dug out of the tarnishing soil, and the immortal impressions became bright again under the warmth of her fingers. She knelt beside the trenches

where lay the prostrate statues, freed their faces from the inert crust, and saw under the opaque clay, the serene smile of a life divine. At Marathon, on the battlefield, she read, with eyes full of tears, the names of the fallen Athenians inscribed upon a heroic column; and at Delphi she divined the mystic melody of the pæan engraved upon the marble of a sacred shaft. Wherever a vestige remained of the grand myths, or a fragment of the beautiful imagery, into which the chosen race transfigured the forces of nature, she passed with her animating grace, journeying lightly the length of the centuries, like the song of the nightingale along a country strewn with ruins. . . .

Bianca Maria. Who was she? Am I to recognize myself in her? For you everything becomes transfigured! I have only been a weak, though willing helper; the joys and pains of my brother were my joys and my pains. My heart trembled when his heart trembled. . . .

Alessandro. Ah, what mystery, what beauty is there that you do not reflect in your person? You too, you too, like Cassandra, whose ashes and whose golden ornaments you have gathered, have put your foot upon the threshold of the Scæan gate. Across the strata of the seven towns, one built on top of the other, your eyes have discerned the signs of the fatal fire, prophesied by the indefatigable voice of her who now lies there silent, in your shadow. Has the illusion of time not yet disappeared for you? Is the distance of centuries not yet abolished for you? It was necessary that at last I should find in a living and beloved creature, that unity of life to which the whole strength of my art aspires. You alone possess the divine secret. When your hand takes the diadem which adorned the brow of the prophetess, the gesture seems to evoke the antique soul; and an ideal resurrection seems to magnify an act so simple. There is in you a life-giving power of which you yourself are unconscious. The simplest of your acts suffices to reveal to me a truth of which I was ignorant. And love is like the intellect: it shines in proportion to the truth it discovers. Tell me then, tell me: what seems to you most sacred,

most worthy to be preserved and exalted above any obstacle and against any interdiction.

BIANCA MARIA [*powerless*] No, no . . . You are intoxicated with your own emotions. What you see in me, is in your own eyes. Your words create out of nothing the image you wish to love. In you, in you is all the power. . . .

ALESSANDRO. What of it? What of it? All the power that is in me would remain shut in and would be wasted in a thousand little whirls of emotion, if the divine voluptuousness that is in you did not attract and incite it to manifest itself in the form and in the words of joy. Joy, joy, is what I ask of you! The other day, when I gave you the flowers, traces of tears were on your face; but around you, in the sunshine, every single hair on your head breathed joy impatiently. I must be free and happy in the fullness of your love, to find at last the celestial harmony sought by more than one. I need you! I need you!

BIANCA MARIA [*summoning all her strength*] Well then, tell me, tell me: what are you going to do? What are you going to do with me, with the people whom I love, whom you love? Tell me! [*A pause.*]

ALESSANDRO. Let destiny be accomplished. . . .

BIANCA MARIA. But the sorrow? But the sorrow? Do you not feel that a cloud of grief is upon our heads, growing denser and crushing us? Do you not feel that the beloved souls nearest to us are suffering from their divination of a sin, or from their apprehension of a catastrophe which they do not know how to meet? A moment ago you reminded me of my tears. . . . Ah, if I could only tell you all the anguish of that day, — if I could only tell you my misery and my dismay! *She* knew, *she* knew. I felt that *she* knew. Her hands so full of life — ah, too full of life! — dug into my soul as one searches a garment for the most hidden folds. An unspeakable torture! My secret was in her hands, and she plucked it as one plucks the petals of a cut rose. And yet I felt in her I know not what sweetness, mingled with her despair; and it seemed to me that her heart was in turns contracting like a knot

and opening like a flower, and that she would rise eagerly toward life. . . . [*A pause.*]

ALESSANDRO [*hesitating*] You believe that she is sure?

BIANCA MARIA. She is sure. [*A pause*] And he? You do not think that he has a suspicion?

ALESSANDRO. Oh, no! No suspicion lies in him. I know him well. . . .

BIANCA MARIA. But the strange change in him, his secret and almost savage sadness, his attitude toward me. . . . At times he fixes upon me a glance I cannot bear. When I go near him, when I take his hands, it seems sometimes that a violent aversion arises in all his being. . . .

ALESSANDRO. You are mistaken, Bianca Maria. He has no suspicion, but his condition troubles him strangely. . . .

BIANCA MARIA. His condition! Then you also think that he is really ill?

ALESSANDRO. His nerves are strained by too long and too fierce a tension. Dark imaginations must torment his weakened spirit. Certainly there is something inexplicable about him. . . . But he will speak to me, he will reveal to me the hallucination which pursues him; he will confess to me his terror. A man cannot with impunity uncover the sepulchers and look at the faces of the dead; and of such dead! [*A pause*] He will speak to me. Last night he was about to speak . . . I will find him to-night. You do not know where he has gone?

BIANCA MARIA. I do not know. Perhaps to the fountain of Perseus. That is the place he prefers when he desires to be alone. The water! The water! Ah, what in the world is more beautiful than the water? Everything here is dried up, everywhere there is thirst, thirst! . . . There is the only refuge; there is a sweet murmur that soothes, that soothes the thoughts. [*She leaves the table, where the golden relics are, moving toward the balcony with a slowness almost of abandon*] The water! The water! How long since I saw a large river flowing through green meadows, a lake in a wreath of woods, a waterfall whiter than snow. . . .

ALESSANDRO [*pale with emotion, stopping her suddenly*

on her way, taking her hands] Ah, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful, and sweet, indeed, and fresh, in truth, like water that flows, like water that quenches. . . . All your beauty, ah, it seems all your beauty inundates my senses like living water, like water that palpitates, that trembles. . . . Ah, beautiful, beautiful, for no one so beautiful as for me!

BIANCA MARIA [*faintly*] Leave me! Leave me, Alessandro!

ALESSANDRO [*as if intoxicated*] I feel the love well up in all your veins, in your hair; I see it gush forth from under your eyelids. . . . I breathe the aroma of the tears in your eyes. . . . Your whole form vanishes into mine. . . . You are all within me, like a nectar that I have drunk. . . . [*He leans over to kiss her lips. She starts back amazed, scarcely suppressing a cry. They remain face to face, panting, unable to speak.*]

BIANCA MARIA [*shivering*] Listen!

ALESSANDRO. What is it?

BIANCA MARIA. *Her* voice. [*Both stand listening for a moment*] It is her voice, it is her voice. She is looking for you; surely she is looking for you.

ALESSANDRO. Do not fear, do not fear.

BIANCA MARIA. She knows everything, she understands everything. . . . It is not possible to conceal . . . As soon as she crosses the threshold she will hear our pulses beat. It is not possible to hide. . . .

ALESSANDRO [*with sadness*] We need not hide anything from a soul that deserves to hear the truth, Bianca Maria.

BIANCA MARIA. But the pain, but the pain. . . .

ALESSANDRO. She is the slave of pain. It is not given to us to do anything to set her free. She is in another life.

BIANCA MARIA. In another life! [*She bows her head and moves toward the door.*]

[*Anna, guided by The Nurse, appears upon the threshold. Her whole manner expresses grief, though she is strangely calm.*]

ANNA. Bianca Maria!

BIANCA MARIA [*taking her hand*] Here I am.

ANNA. Go, go, nurse. [*The Nurse retires. Bianca*

Maria leads the blind woman toward Alessandro] Alessandro!

ALESSANDRO. I am here, Anna.

[*The blind woman holds out her hand to him. He grasps it, and she remains for some moments in silence, standing between the two. Then detaching herself from him, she draws Bianca Maria toward her.*]

ANNA. Give me a kiss, Bianca Maria. [*She kisses her on the mouth*] You seem to have been away from me an endless time. . . . What have you been doing? [*Bianca Maria confused, hesitates to answer*] What have you been doing?

BIANCA MARIA [*bewildered*] I have been here, almost all day, assisting my brother.

[*Alessandro goes to the balcony and stands, leaning on the railing, looking out upon the country.*]

ANNA. This is the room of the golden relics?

BIANCA MARIA. It is.

ANNA. And of the ashes?

BIANCA MARIA. And of the ashes.

ANNA. Where are they?

BIANCA MARIA. Over there, in the copper vases.

ANNA. Take me there. I should like to touch them.

BIANCA MARIA [*leads her to one of the cinerary urns*] Here. Here are the ashes of Cassandra; there the ashes of the King.

ANNA [*in a low voice*] Cassandra! She, too, could see. . . . She always saw around her misfortune and death. [*She bends over the urn, takes a handful of ashes and lets them sift through her fingers.*] How soft these ashes are. They glide through your fingers like the sands of the sea. . . . You were reading her words yesterday, Alessandro. Amid the terrible shouting there was a voice infinitely sweet and sad. The old men compared her to a "somber nightingale." . . . What were her words when she remembered her beautiful river? And when the old men asked her about the love of the god? Do you not remember them?

BIANCA MARIA. He does not hear you, Anna.

ANNA. He does not hear me?

BIANCA MARIA. He is on the balcony.

ANNA. Ah, he is on the balcony.

BIANCA MARIA [*turning to the balcony*] He is looking at the sunset. It is a marvelous sunset. Behind the cape of Artemisium the whole sky is on fire. The top of Arachnæus burns like a pyre. The red reflection reaches this far, and strikes this gold. . . .

ANNA. Take me nearer the relics.

BIANCA MARIA [*conducting her to one of the tables*] Here are the remains of Cassandra!

ANNA [*touching them lightly*] Is her mask here?

BIANCA MARIA [*guiding the hands of the blind woman*] Here it is.

ANNA [*touching the golden mask with her fingers*] How large her mouth is. The terrible work of divination dilated it. She cried, imprecated, lamented without rest. Can you imagine her with a silent mouth? What could have been the form of her grieving lips in silence? What stupor, when she was silent, when the spirit granted her a pause between two clamors! To-night I should like to have you read to me over again the dialogue between Cassandra and the old men. Have you not in your memory her words when she speaks of the god who loved her, and of the elders who asked her if she yielded in the struggle? She appears to me to blush with shame at that moment. . . . "I promised," she says, "I promised" . . . Do you not remember her words?

BIANCA MARIA [*more and more troubled*] No, Anna. To-night I will read to you . . .

ANNA. "I promised but I deceived him," she says. She deceived the god, who took revenge upon her. No one believed her any longer! She was alone, on the top of a tower, with her truth. [*A pause. She continues to feel of the relics*] You also, like Alessandro, love her, this "somber nightingale"?

BIANCA MARIA. Her destiny was a terrible one. She was a martyr. . . .

ANNA. She was very beautiful; she was as beautiful as

Venus. Leonardo saw her face under the golden mask! It is strange, but it seems as if I also had seen it. . . . What color do you think were her eyes?

BIANCA MARIA. Black, may be.

ANNA. They were not black, but they seemed to be because the pupils were so dilated with her prophetic ardor that they devoured the iris. I think, when she paused, when she wiped the foam from her livid lips, her eyes were soft and sad like two violets. Such must they have been before closing forever. Do you remember, Bianca Maria, her last words? Do you not recollect them?

BIANCA MARIA. To-night I will read them to you, Anna. . . .

ANNA. She speaks of a shadow that passes over everything and of a damp sponge that obliterates all traces. Is it not so? "And over this," she says, "and over this I grieve more than over all else." These are her last words. [*A pause. She holds in her hands a golden pair of scales*] Listen!

BIANCA MARIA. They are the falcons of the mountain of Eubœa, screaming.

ANNA. How they scream to-night!

BIANCA MARIA. When the air is burning they scream still louder.

ANNA. Why do they scream? I should like to understand the voices of the birds, as the prophetess did. I did not know that episode of her infancy, which Alessandro told me. She was left one night in the temple of Apollo; and in the morning she was found stretched on the marble wrapped in the folds of a serpent that was licking her ears. After that she understood all the voices of the air. She would understand to-day the screaming of the falcons.

BIANCA MARIA [*in ecstasy*] Cries of joy! Cries of joy! Such beautiful and proud creatures, if you could see them! They are full of vigorous and aggressive life. They have the colors of the rocks; brown wings, reddish body, a whitish breast and gray head. Nothing is more graceful and more ferocious than the little gray head, with its shining black eyes in yellow circles. Day before yesterday

when I was looking at them in the sky, one of the guards shot one in the breast with his gun. It fell almost at my feet, and I picked it up. Though hurt to death, it attempted to seize my hand. Blood suffocated it and ran down its beak; a sort of a sob shook it, while the red drops fell one by one. The eyes became dim, the claws contracted, the little head sank upon its breast. Another bleeding sigh. It was the last. There remained in my hand only a clod. . . . And that life, so free and so violent, had, a few moments before, throbbed in the sky!

ANNA. How you speak of life and death, Bianca Maria! [*A pause*] Is Alessandro on the balcony?

BIANCA MARIA. He is.

ANNA. What is he doing?

BIANCA MARIA. He is looking far away. [*A pause.*]

ANNA. What is this thing I have in my hands?

BIANCA MARIA. It is a pair of scales.

ANNA. Ah, a pair of scales. [*She touches the two scales*] Was it upon the breast of the dead princess?

BIANCA MARIA. Upon her breast.

ANNA. In order to weigh destiny! But it is not true, is it? It is not accurate. It seems to me it inclines to one side. . . .

BIANCA MARIA. It is spoiled. One of the golden chains that hold the two scales is missing on one side.

ANNA. On which side?

ALESSANDRO [*coming in from the balcony*] There is Leonardo! Leonardo is coming!

BIANCA MARIA. Where from?

ALESSANDRO. From the fountain of Perseus.

ANNA [*laying down the scales*] Shall we go down to the fountain of Perseus, Bianca Maria? Will you take me there? We can sit upon the stone near the pool for a little while and breathe the refreshing perfume of the mint and the myrtle that is so wholesome.

BIANCA MARIA. I will go with you, Anna. Here is my arm.

[*Leonardo enters and turns his searching, troubled gaze upon each one. His manner expresses incessant uneasiness and the painful effort at self-control.*]

LEONARDO [*going up to Anna with signs of affection*] Ah, you are here, too, Anna. . . .

ANNA. Did you come from the fountain?

LEONARDO. Yes, I came from there. . . . I go down there almost every day toward sunset. It is the hour when the myrtle becomes as pungent as incense, and almost produces a stupor. To-night it is very strong; it seems to permeate the water. When I drank, I seemed to taste in the water the essential oil. . . .

ANNA. Did you hear, Bianca Maria?

BIANCA MARIA. Do you wish to go, Anna? Here is my arm.

ANNA [*taking the arm of her guide*] We are going down to the fountain. . . . Alessandro, has the sun set?

ALESSANDRO [*on the threshold of the balcony*] It has set.

ANNA. Is there no more light?

ALESSANDRO. Yes, there is still a little.

ANNA. Why do the falcons scream?

ALESSANDRO. They cry until late; until the first stars. . . .

ANNA. Good-by. [*She goes out with Bianca Maria.*]

[*Alessandro remains on the balcony, his back against one of the jambs of the door, still looking at the country. Leonardo, with his eyes, follows his sister as she leads the blind woman over the threshold.*]

ALESSANDRO. What is that fire over there upon the summit of Larissa? Look! One, two, three fires. . . . Another fire there below Lycone. Do you see? Do you see the columns of smoke? They seem motionless. Not a breath of air is stirring. What an endless calm! It is one of the most beautiful and most solemn nights that I have ever witnessed. [*A pause. Leonardo approaches his friend, places a hand upon his shoulder with a fraternal gesture and remains silent*] Look at the color and the lines of the mountains against the sky! Every time I look at

them in the evening, I feel for a moment a spontaneous adoration toward their divinity. In no other land does one feel as in this, that there is something sacred in the view of distant mountains. Is it not so?

LEONARDO [*in an altered voice*] It is true. One must pray to the mountains, they are pure.

ALESSANDRO. How pure they are to-night! They seem to be made of sapphire. Arachnæus only is still red; its top is always the last to go out. But what are those fires? They multiply, they spread over the hills, down to the plain. . . . Look, below Larissa there is a wreath of them. It is strange that the columns of smoke should be so white. They seem to be illuminated by another light, by an invisible moon, do they not? They are religious columns and perhaps they carry the supplications of men.

LEONARDO. Perhaps. Men implore for rain, for the thirsty soil.

ALESSANDRO. This drought is terrible. [*A pause. Leonardo moves a few steps into the room, where it begins to grow dark around the treasures, sparkling confusedly. He is incapable of restraining his agitation. He approaches the table where lie the relics of Cassandra. Alessandro follows him with an anxious look*] Ah, see if the jewels of Cassandra are well arranged. Bianca Maria was putting them in order when I came to look for you. I wished to help her; but then . . . we talked . . . and the hour passed in a moment. . . . We spoke of you too, Leonardo.

LEONARDO [*excited*] Of me?

ALESSANDRO. Of you; of your secret. . . .

LEONARDO [*turning pale*] My secret?

ALESSANDRO [*approaching his friend and taking his hand gently*] What is the matter with you? Tell me, what is the matter with you? Why do you tremble so?

LEONARDO. I do not know why I tremble.

ALESSANDRO. Am I no longer the brother of your soul? So many days I have waited for you to speak to me, to confess to me your trouble. . . . Have you no longer faith in me? Am I no longer for you the one who understands everything and to whom you may tell everything?

LEONARDO [*repressing the anguish which suffocates him*] Yes, yes, Alessandro, you are still the one. What do I not owe you? What was I before knowing you, before communing with your soul? What was I? I owe you everything; the revelation of life. . . . You have caused me to live by your flame; you have brought to life around me all things that were dead before. . . . Ah, what would all that treasure be to me, if I had not known you? Useless dross! You, you alone have made me worthy to witness a prodigy. . . .

ALESSANDRO. And now? Now I can do nothing for your happiness?

LEONARDO [*confused*] I do not know the nature of my trouble. . . . I do not know what it is. . . .

ALESSANDRO. My poor friend! For two years now, two long years you have been here in this arid country, at the feet of these bare mountains, shut up in a ditch of the dead city, delving in the earth, delving in the earth with those frightful phantoms always standing before your eyes in the burning dust. . . . How is it that your strength has not given out before this? For two years you have been breathing the murderous exhalations of the hidden sepulchers, bent under the horror of the most tragic destiny that has ever devoured a human race. How have you been able to resist? How is it you were not afraid of losing your mind? You look like one poisoned; and at times I have seen in your eyes the glint of madness.

LEONARDO. Yes, yes, it is true; I have been poisoned. . . .

ALESSANDRO. Why did you refuse to listen to me? When you called me, when I came here, you had already been taken with the wicked fever. I foresaw the danger. . . . I wished to tear you away from that fixed idea, take you elsewhere, interrupt the terrible work. Do you not remember? We should have passed the spring at Zante by the sea, not far away. . . . But your obstinacy was unconquerable; the sorcery had already taken hold of you. . . . But now you must leave without delay. You must go to the water, to the woods, to the green fields. . . . You need the soothing embrace of a beautiful green land; you must

sleep, and your dreams must sink deep into green herbs; new thoughts must enter into your soul, little by little. . . .

LEONARDO. Yes, yes, you are right; we must leave here, we must go far away. . . . But where? Where? . . . And she also. . . . She also, my sister, Bianca Maria . . . should go with us. . . . She, too, should go with us. . . .

ALESSANDRO [*troubled, hesitating*] She, too. . . . Do you not think that she also is oppressed, that she also needs to breathe, to live. . . . She grieves for you, she weeps for you. . . .

LEONARDO. She weeps? Weeps?

ALESSANDRO. She fears that you love her no longer, that you feel for her no more the tenderness of old. . . .

LEONARDO [*deadly pale and hoarse*] The tenderness of old. . . . She weeps? She weeps?

ALESSANDRO [*seizing his hands anew, almost with violence*] What is the matter with you now? What is it? Why do you tremble so?

LEONARDO [*with a desperate impulse*] Ah, if you could only save me!

ALESSANDRO. I must, I will save you, Leonardo.

LEONARDO. You cannot, you cannot. . . . I am lost. [*He takes a few aimless steps about the room; goes toward the balcony; goes toward the door, closes it and turns to Alessandro, staggering as if attacked by a sudden fit of delirium*] What can I tell you? How can I tell you? . . . Ah, it is horrible, horrible. . . .

ALESSANDRO [*struck by the gesture and the words*] Leonardo!

LEONARDO [*lets himself fall upon a chair and presses his temples with the palms of his hands*] A horrible thing!

ALESSANDRO [*again taking his hands and bending toward his face, in the shade*] Do speak, do speak! Do you not see that you are wringing my heart?

LEONARDO. Yes, I will speak, I will tell you. . . . But do not look at me so close; do not hold my hands. . . . Sit there. . . . Wait. . . . Wait until it is darker. . . . I will tell you. . . . I must tell you . . . you . . . you alone . . . a horrible thing!

ALESSANDRO [*seating himself at a little distance and speaking in a low voice, oppressed with anxiety*] Here, I will sit here. . . . I am waiting. . . . I am waiting. . . . You are in the shade. . . . I scarcely see you. . . . Speak!

LEONARDO. How am I to tell it? [*A pause. The two are sitting opposite each other in the dusk, brightened only by the light of the golden treasure. When Leonardo resumes, his voice is hoarse and broken. Alessandro listens motionless, as if his whole being were contracted with anguish*] Ah, you know her, you know her. . . . You know how sweet, how tender, how pure she is . . . my sister. . . . You know what she has been to me, during the years of solitude and of labor. . . . She has been the perfume of my life, the rest and the refreshment, the advice and the comfort, and the dream, and the poetry, and everything. . . . You know, you know. . . . [*A pause*] What other joys did my youth know? What other woman crossed my path? None. My blood ran without being troubled. . . . I lived as if under a vow; I trembled only for the beauty of the statues that I unearthed. . . . Our life has always been as pure as a prayer, in the solitude. . . . Ah, that solitude. . . . How long, how long have we lived side by side, brother and sister, alone, alone and happy, like two children. . . . I ate the fruit upon which was the mark of her teeth, and I drank the water from the hollow of her hand. [*A pause*] Alone, always alone, in places full of light! . . . Now, imagine one who unconsciously drinks a poison, a philter, something impure which poisons his blood and contaminates his soul all of a sudden when his mind is at peace. . . . Imagine such an incredible misfortune! . . . Take an ordinary hour of your existence, an hour similar to many others; it is a wintry day, lucid and clear as a diamond; everything is light, everything is visible from near and far. You return from your work; your mind relaxes; you discover nothing strange in yourself, nor in things; your breath is calm, your soul is at peace, your life passes as it did yesterday, in its continuity from the past toward the future. . . . You return to your home, filled with light and quiet as it was the day before; you open a door, you enter a room,

. . . and you see her . . . her, your innocent companion, asleep before the fire, tinged by the rosy flame, her small naked feet exposed to the heat. You look at her and smile. And while you smile, a sudden and involuntary thought flashes across your mind; an unclean thought, against which your whole being rebels with trembling. . . . In vain! In vain! The thought persists, grows in strength, becomes monstrous, dominates you. . . . Ah, is this possible? . . . It enslaves you, permeates your blood, and invades all your senses. You are its prey, its miserable, trembling prey; your whole soul, your pure soul is infected; and everything in you is stained with contamination. . . . Ah, is it credible? [*He jumps to his feet, observing that Alessandro trembles in the darkness. His whole body is shaken as by a chill of fever. He takes a few steps toward the balcony, then returns to his seat again. Alessandro's eyes are wide open and fixed upon him*] Now imagine my life here in this house, with her and with that monster. Here in the house, whether full of light or of darkness, I alone with her! . . . A desperate and secret struggle, without rest, without escape, day and night, in every hour and every moment growing more atrocious as it drew toward me the unsuspecting pity of the poor creature. . . . Nothing availed: neither the furious work, nor the almost beast-like weariness, nor the stupor which the sun and dust caused me, nor the daily excitement of finding promising traces in the soil which I turned up. Nothing, nothing served to overcome the horrible fever, to interrupt for some instants at least, the wicked insanity. I have closed my eyes when I saw her coming toward me from a distance, and my eyelids were upon my eyes as fire upon fire. And while the throbbing of my blood deafened my ears, I thought, with an agony that seemed to be that of death: "Ah, if upon re-opening my eyes I could look at her as I looked at her once, seeing in her only the saintly sister!" And, to free my miserable soul from this evil, my will-power shook it with a violence and with the mad terror of one who shakes his garments in which a snake is hidden. Useless, ever useless! She came to me with her usual step, I am

sure, but it seemed different to me, and troubled me like ambiguous language. And the uneasier and sadder she found me to be, the sweeter she became. And when her calm hands touched me, all my bones trembled and shook with cold, my heart stopped beating, my brow was bathed in perspiration and my hair rose as in deadly fear. . . . Ah, far worse than death was the fear that she might guess the truth, the terrible truth! [*A pause*] The night! The night! If the light was frightful, the darkness was more frightful yet; the darkness warm with breathing, the darkness which brings hallucinations and delirium. . . . She slept in the room adjoining mine. Every evening, on the threshold, she offered her cheek to me, before retiring; from her bed she spoke to me at times, through the wall. . . . Listening, I could hear her regular breath in sleep, during my wakeful anguish. It was impossible for me to sleep! It seemed that my eyelids would burn my eyes, that my eyelashes were like pins over a wound. . . . And the heavy hours died away, one after the other; the dawn came, and with the dawn came sleep upon intolerable weariness, and with the sleep, the dreams. . . . Oh, the dreams, the infamous dreams, against which the spirit cannot defend itself! It is better to lie awake, better to suffer torture upon the pillow as if upon the fire, better to agonize in weariness. . . . Do you understand? Do you understand? When at last sleep falls upon your misery, suddenly like a crushing shock, when the poor flesh becomes dull and heavy as lead, when all your being longs to die, to die for a time, — do you understand? — the desperate struggle against the cravings of nature, in the fear of falling, during sleep, an unresisting prey to the repulsive monster. . . . I wake up terror-stricken, as if after a crime, my flesh creeping with horror, not knowing whether I have only been dreaming or whether I am guilty of a mortal sin, more tired than before, more miserable and hating the light — I who fear darkness, — with an instinctive desire to hang my head and gaze upon the ground like a dumb brute. . . .

ALESSANDRO [*in a suffocated voice, entirely changed*] Stop! Stop! [*He rises, convulsively, unable to control his*

pain; he goes to the balcony, draws a deep breath, and turns his face to the starry sky.]

LEONARDO. Ah, I suffocate you. Look, look at the stars! Breathe, you who may do so. . . .

ALESSANDRO [*softly, approaching him and touching his head with a trembling hand*] Stop now! Stop! Nothing more. . . . [*He takes a few steps in the darkness, staggering; goes toward the door, opens it, looks out, closes it again; then returns to Leonardo, whose face is bowed in his hands, and touches his head. He returns to the balcony. Leonardo rises and joins him. In silence, side by side, they look at the country, dotted with red fires, in the calm, pure night.*]

CURTAIN

ACT THREE.

The same room as in the first act. The large loggia is open: through the opening between the columns is seen the sky of night, glittering with stars. A candle burns upon the table loaded with relics. The silence is profound.

[*Anna is seated near the steps; the breezes of the night fan her white face raised to the stars, invisible to her. When she speaks, a singular indefinable animation thrills in her voice, like a soft breeze. The Nurse is kneeling before her, sad and resigned.*]

ANNA [*holding out her hands to the night*] A little breath of air comes from time to time. . . . A little wind is stirring, is it not, nurse? Do you not smell the myrtle?

NURSE. The wind rises from the earth.

ANNA. The earth is breathing. A while ago when I went down to the fountain with Bianca Maria not a breath of air could be felt: none! It was a perfect calm, without change. We did not speak a word, lest we disturb it. The fountain only wept and laughed. . . . Have you ever listened to the voice of the fountain, nurse?

NURSE. The water always says the same thing.

ANNA. It does not, it does not. We did not speak a word, Bianca Maria and I, and the water said an infinity of things which entered my soul like an eloquent pleading. . . . It has persuaded me to do the one necessary thing, nurse. That good, pure water that comes from the depths, from the depths. . . .

NURSE [*uneasily*] What are you going to do? What are you going to do?

ANNA. I wish to go away, go far, far away.

NURSE. You wish to go! Where?

ANNA [*brokenly and volubly*] You will know, you will

know. . . . Do not get excited; be tranquil, poor nurse. I shall travel that road without you to guide me. I shall no longer need to lean upon you, my poor nurse. Light will be granted to my eyes. . . . What did you say the other day about my eyes? "Why should the Lord have left them so beautiful, if He did not mean to illuminate them once more?" Do you see, nurse? I remember your words, and now I know that my eyes are beautiful!

NURSE. How you talk to-night! There is something behind your speech. . . . But I am a poor old woman.

ANNA [*seized by sudden emotion, places her hands upon the shoulders of her nurse*] You are my dear old friend, my first and my last love, nurse. I have still some drops of your milk in the blood of my heart, dear nurse! Ah, your breast is dry, but your kindness has become greater every day. You led me by the hand when my little feet did not know how to take a step, and now you lead me with the same faithful patience through this horrible darkness. You are a saint, nurse. I hold a paradise for you in my soul. . . .

NURSE. Now you want to make me weep. . . .

ANNA [*throwing her arms around her neck*] Ah, forgive me, forgive! I must make you weep.

NURSE [*frightened, freeing herself from the embrace and looking Anna in the face*] Why, why do you speak so? Why do you strangle me so?

ANNA [*trying to allay her anxiety*] Oh, no, no, . . . nothing, nothing. . . . I spoke so because I can now give you no other joy, poor nurse, no other joy. . . .

NURSE. You are hiding nothing from me, are you? You could not deceive your poor friend, could you? You could not deceive her. . . .

ANNA. No, no. Forgive me. I do not know what I am saying to-night, nor understand my feelings. . . . I am strangely talkative. A while ago I felt so light, as if I could fly; I felt almost merry: and I talked and talked. . . . And then suddenly sadness came over me and I gave you pain. . . . Now I feel better, almost well, after having embraced you, nurse. I wish you would hold me in your lap and tell me of the little things of long ago that you

remember about me, about me when my mother was living. . . . Do you remember? Do you remember? [*A pause*] Ah, why have I not had a son, the son that *he* wished to have — why? I should be saved now. I should be safe! No mother ever loved the offspring of her blood, as I would have loved mine. Everything else would have seemed nothing to me. I should have continually poured the sweetest part of my life into his. Continually I should have watched the little divine soul in order to recognize, every moment, the resemblance, the only resemblance; his affection would have been dearer to me than the light. . . . But the same Judge has made me blind and childless: an atonement for what sin, nurse? Tell me! What great fault has been committed? . . . [*A pause. The Nurse's eyes are full of tears*] How soon my mother left me! She had me, she had me; she adored me, and still she was not happy. . . . You know it, do you not? You know it well. You know why she died. You will not tell me, nurse, why she died . . . and how she died.

NURSE [*troubled and hesitating*] It was a fever, a sudden violent fever which carried her off in one night. Did you not know that?

ANNA. Ah, no, no; it was not a fever. Why have you never been willing to tell me the truth?

NURSE. Is that not the truth?

ANNA. It is not, it is not! In the evening, my mother stood at my bedside, and while I was falling asleep, I felt her kisses upon my face, and something warm, like tears. . . . Ah, sleep was so strong, it conquered the vague pain in my little heart; and in the dying twilight of consciousness it seemed that she let drop upon my face, upon my neck, upon my hands, the leaves of the rose which I had plucked that day from the basin of the fountain in the garden. That was the last glimpse that I had of my mother. . . . Later you came to waken me, and asked me if I had seen her, and when and how she had left me; and you were very excited. But I fell asleep again, listening to tramping of people passing through the garden as if seeking something. And in the morning, a little after dawn, you came again

to rouse me; you wrapped me in a cloak and carried me in your trembling arms to another house, where you spoke in a whisper, where everybody spoke in whispers and was pale. . . . And I never saw her again. . . . And then when we returned to our garden, you always kept me away from the fountain, and whenever you were there, your lips moved as if in prayer. . . . [*A pause*] Tell me the truth! Tell me the truth! Why did she wish to die?

NURSE [*disconcerted*] No, no . . . you are mistaken, you are mistaken. . . .

ANNA. Shall I never know?

NURSE. You are mistaken. . . . Ah, thus you always seek to renew your sorrow!

ANNA [*caressing her*] Forgive me! Forgive me! I have caused you pain again! [*A pause*] Do you smell the myrtle? Do you notice how strong it is? [*She gets up and, turning toward the open loggia, inhales the perfume and holds out her hands*] The wind has risen, it seems to tinkle through my fingers like a crystal. Is the door of my room open?

NURSE. It is.

ANNA. All the windows are open?

NURSE. All.

ANNA. The wind passes like a perfumed river! Where may Bianca Maria be?

NURSE. Perhaps in her room. Do you wish me to call her?

ANNA. No, no. . . . Let her rest, the poor thing! She nearly fainted at the fountain from the strong odor of the myrtle. I felt her stagger while we were returning. More than once I had to support her. . . . See how sure I am of myself, nurse! I led her instead of her leading me. I think I could go down and come up again alone. . . .

NURSE. But why do you speak so much of that fountain?

ANNA. We are all attracted toward it as toward a source of life. Is it not the only living thing in this place where everything is dead and burnt? It alone quenches our thirst; and all the thirst that is in us turns greedily toward

its freshness. If it were not, no one could live here; we should all die of thirst.

NURSE. But why did we come to this accursed place? The summer has burst in upon us suddenly, like an inferno. We must flee. When shall we go?

ANNA. Soon, very soon, nurse.

NURSE. Truly, it is a place cursed by God. The chastisement of Heaven is upon this land. Every day processions ascend to the Chapel of the Prophet Elijah, every day. To-night the country is filled with fires. But not a drop of rain falls. If you could see the bed of the river! The pebbles are as dry and bleached as the bones of the dead.

ANNA. The Inachus! The other day Alessandro crossed it . . . that great day of the golden treasure. . . . [*Feeling her way, she seats herself upon the highest step.*] Shall I tell you the fable of the river, nurse? Listen! Once upon a time there was a king called Inachus, the king of the river; and this king had a daughter called Io, so beautiful, so beautiful that another king, omnipotent, the king of the world, fell in love with her and desired her. But his jealous wife changed the maiden into a heifer as white as snow, and put her in charge of a shepherd who was called Argus, and had a hundred eyes. This terrible shepherd pastured the white heifer down there, near the sea, in the meadows of Lerna; and day and night he spied incessantly upon her with his hundred eyes. Then the king of the world, bent upon liberating the maiden, sent the Prince Hermes to kill the cruel custodian; and Prince Hermes, having reached the plain, began to play his flute so sweetly that Argus fell asleep; and in his sleep, with his sword, he cut off the big head with its hundred eyes. But the jealous wife sent a gadfly, that stung the side of the heifer like a point of fire and made her frantic with pain. With the gadfly in her side, the frantic Io began to run over the sands of the sea; and she ran, and ran, and ran over all the earth, through rivers and straits, and over the mountains, always with the gadfly in her side, crazed with pain and terror, consumed with thirst and hunger, sinking

with weariness, foaming at the mouth, panting, lowing pitifully, without pause, without rest. . . . At last, in a far distant land beyond the sea, the king who loved her appeared, and with a single gesture, barely touching her, calmed her, and restored her to human form, and she gave birth to a black child. And from this black child, after five generations, descended the Danaides, the fifty Danaides. . . . [*She leans over toward The Nurse, whose head has sunk upon her breast in slumber*] Are you asleep, nurse?

NURSE [*shaking herself*] No, no. . . . I am listening.

ANNA. You are sleepy, poor nurse. At one time it was you, who told me stories to make me sleep. . . . Go, go and rest yourself, nurse. I will call you. I am expecting Alessandro.

NURSE. No, I am not sleepy. . . . But your voice is so sweet. . . .

ANNA. Is Alessandro in his room?

NURSE. He is.

ANNA. I heard him close his door. . . . I heard the key turn.

NURSE. Do you wish me to call him?

ANNA. No, no! . . . Perhaps he desires to be alone; he may be working. . . . [*Listening*] Some one is coming up the stairs.

[*The Nurse rises and goes toward the first door on the right.*]

[*Enter Leonardo, hesitating. He appears less oppressed by his trouble. He is dejected but somewhat resigned; he has been weeping.*]

LEONARDO [*approaching the blind woman humbly*] You are here, Anna. . . . You are alone. . . .

ANNA [*rising and holding out her hands*] I was waiting for some one to come. Alessandro is still in his room, and Bianca Maria . . . I think is resting. . . . She came near fainting down there at the fountain, overcome by the strong fragrance of the myrtle. . . . [*Turning to The Nurse*] Go, nurse. I will call you.

[*The Nurse goes out through the second door to the left.*]

LEONARDO. Ah, she nearly fainted. . . .

ANNA. A dizziness. . . . She plunged her hands into the water to recover herself. I brought her back. . . . How well I can find my way! I believe I could go down alone and come up alone. . . .

LEONARDO. You could not lose your way. . . .

ANNA. Not on that path.

LEONARDO. Will you be seated, Anna?

ANNA. No, I should like to step out on the loggia. The night must be marvelous.

[*Leonardo guides her up the steps. Both stop between the columns. Anna leans against a column, her face turned toward the sky.*]

LEONARDO. It is marvelous; and so clear that one can distinguish all the stones in the walls of the Dead City.

ANNA. You call it dead, the city of the golden treasure! It seems to me that for you, it ought to be living with a life incredible. I should think that you would see forever what you alone have seen.

LEONARDO. Ah, it is dead, dead indeed. . . . It has given me all that it could give. To-day it is no more than a desecrated cemetery. The five sepulchers are nothing but five empty and shapeless mouths.

ANNA. They must be hungry again. . . . [*A pause*] Are you looking at the stars?

LEONARDO. They never shone more brightly; their scintillation is so rapid and so strong that they seem near to us. The Big Dipper almost frightens me. It flames as if it had entered the terrestrial atmosphere. The Milky Way seems to wave in the wind like a long veil.

ANNA. Ah, at last you recognize the beauty of the sky! Alessandro said that, fascinated by the sepulchers, you had forgotten the beauty of the heavens.

LEONARDO. To look at the stars, the eyes must be pure.

ANNA. Did not Bianca Maria give you the ointment for your suffering eyes, which she promised you?

LEONARDO [*with a changed voice*] Yes, indeed, my eyes are beginning to improve. . . .

ANNA [*sweetly, trying to get nearer to his soul*] You have some grudge against your sister, Leonardo. . . .

LEONARDO [*trembling*] I?

ANNA. More than once, Leonardo, more than once I have noticed your excited state when she was present, or when some one spoke of her. . . .

LEONARDO [*trembling*] You have noticed. . . .

ANNA. Have you no confidence in me? Do you not think that my soul is fitted for the truth? Do you not believe that I am partly of the life beyond? Beyond the beautiful and cruel life which the light of day illuminates?

LEONARDO. Of what truth do you speak, Anna? Of what truth?

ANNA. Of the truth that I know, that no one can hide, that no one can change, that no one can change. [*A pause. Leonardo, shocked and perplexed, looks at her fixedly, his back against the other column*] I see that you are excited, full of anxiety and fear. . . . I know you are suffering. And you are not suffering alone, Leonardo; we all suffer; and each of us tries to hide it from the others; and each is conscious of committing an offense against the others, and against himself, because he feels that his faith is shaken; and we live without courage, doubting and humiliated, while truth is seated in the midst of us, and looks at us with inflexible eyes. . . .

LEONARDO. I do not understand you.

ANNA. Oh, do not try to spare me! If you recognize any nobility in my soul, if it seems to you that I have been so many years a neither unworthy nor useless companion of the man whom you love and admire above all others, if you think that I am not undeserving of the fraternal kindness that you have shown me at all times, Leonardo, do not try to spare me; do not show for me the pity which you would have for a poor and weak creature, afraid of pain! The air of the night alone passes between us. This is the moment for us to speak out all that is most serious and strongest within us. Any delay will be a weakness, a peril perhaps. . . .

LEONARDO [*surprised and trembling*] I am amazed. . . . Your words were unexpected. . . .

ANNA. I have felt for a long time that you were suffering; for too long a time have I felt in my darkness. . . . I cannot express it, I cannot express it. . . . I feel as if a web of secret things were being woven in silence . . . an impalpable web, which, however, at times holds me like a snare. . . . Ah, I cannot live so. I cannot continue to live so; I can live no longer if not in truth, for the light of my eyes has gone out. Well, then, let us tell the truth. I, I alone am the cause of this misery. I no longer belong to this beautiful and cruel world. I am an impediment, an inert obstacle against which so much hope and so much strength hurl themselves and break into fragments. . . . What crime is it then, if that dear creature obeys, trembling and weeping, the fate that ensnares her? Why should you deprive her of your tenderness, when everything that is human in her yields to the greatest of human needs? Something was slumbering in her which now has suddenly awakened, and she herself is frightened by the power of that awakening, she herself trembles at it and weeps. . . . Ah, I know, I know how ardent the desire to live is in her blood! I have held it in my hands, I have felt it beat between my fingers like a wild lark fresh and fragrant with the morning air it drank in. All her face, encircled by her hair, beat like a violent pulse. I had never felt such a strong pulse. The vital power that is in her is incredible. She herself is afraid of it, as of some unknown evil, as of a frenzy going to overwhelm her. At times she believes that she has smothered it under the weight of her anguish, but suddenly it again overwhelms her, and a new voice comes to her lips and she speaks as if inspired. . . . A while ago, before you entered, standing by the ashes and the golden treasure, she told me about a wounded falcon, and the rushing of a thousand wings was in her new voice. [*A pause. Leonardo listens intently without stirring, as if petrified*] What is her crime if she loves? Do you not think, Leonardo, do you not think that her youth has already been sacrificed at your side too long? Can your

brotherly love ask the sacrifice of her entire life? She felt as if she were dying that morning, when she read the lamentation of Antigone. . . . It is not possible that all her vitality should be consumed in sacrifice. She needs pleasure. She was made to give and to receive pleasure. Would you, Leonardo, would you have her renounce her legitimate share of joy? [*A pause. Her courage seems to sink*] And he. . . . [*Her voice dies on her lips. Leonardo shows extreme agony*] . . . How could he fail to love her? He must indeed recognize in her the living embodiment of his loftiest dream: the goddess of Victory that is to crown his life. What am I to him, but a heavy chain, an unbearable burden? You know what a profound aversion he has to all inert grief, to all useless pain, to any prohibition, to any obstacle that may hinder the upward flight of noble forces toward their highest development. You know with what assiduous vigilance he looks about him, and absorbs all that may increase and accelerate the active force of his spirit, to fit him for the works of beauty that he is to accomplish. . . . Ah, what am I, of what value is a poor, half dead husk, as compared with the infinite world of poetry that he carries within him, and which, some day, he will reveal to humanity? What is my solitary sadness, compared to the infinite grief, which he can alleviate with the revelation of his pure art? I am only half alive. . . . I have already one foot in the shadow. I need to take one step only, one little step to disappear . . . oh, a very little step! I know, I know all that gathers and twines around this, my remnant of life, to render it more binding, the legitimate tie, custom, prejudice, pity and remorse. . . . I remember a stone column, corroded and broken, on the shore of a former port, filled with sand, where the skeleton of a ship showed above the water; I remember the useless wreck, around which one could still see the knots of the worn out cables, and remnants of the old anchors. . . . It was the saddest sight to be found; and the open sea, looked upon from that point of view, was a promise unspeakably alluring. [*A pause. She inclines her head upon her breast for a moment, gathering strength. Then she shakes herself and holds her*

hands out to Leonardo, whom excess of emotion prevents from speaking] I lose what I love and save what I can! Put your hands in mine, Leonardo. [*Leonardo moves toward her, staggering, and joins hands. She shivers at the contact*] They are colder than mine; they are icy.

[*They descend the steps.*]

LEONARDO [*in a weak and broken voice*] Forgive me, Anna, if I do not know how to answer you. . . . I will speak to you to-morrow. . . . Promise me that you will wait for me, that you will hear me. . . . I do not know, I cannot now. . . . You understand me, Anna. . . . Promise me that you will hear me to-morrow. . . .

ANNA [*with a sigh*] What could you tell me? Alas, are not my words already too many? Have I not said already what had better remained unsaid? Ah, life eludes us always, and drags us along when we wish to fly from it.

LEONARDO [*with a last outburst of hope*] Are you certain, are you? Are you certain that he loves her, that she loves him? . . . You are certain, Anna, of their love? . . . You do not deceive yourself, do you? It is not a doubt, a suspicion? . . . You are sure . . . sure . . .

ANNA [*struck by his tone*] And you? And you? Are you not certain? [*A pause. Leonardo hesitates to reply*] Why are you silent? Oh, still pity for me?

LEONARDO [*softly, anxiously watching the first door to the left, as if afraid of some surprise*] Alessandro . . . Alessandro is there. . . . You will see him. . . . Will you tell him that you spoke to me . . . that you told me all this?

ANNA. No, no. . . . Forgive me, Leonardo, forgive me! . . . To you, too, to you, too, I ought to have been silent. . . . Silence, ah how difficult silence is, even for those who have renounced life.

LEONARDO. I shall see you again, to-morrow, I shall speak to you, to-morrow. . . . Promise me. . . . I shall find you here to-morrow at the same hour, shall I? Thanks, Anna. [*He kisses her hands*] Thanks! Good-by. [*He turns toward the second door at the right. About to open it, he stops in the act, shaken by an uncontrollable trembling,*

he goes to the door by which he entered and disappears down the stairs, as in flight.]

ANNA [*listening, makes a few steps in the direction of the noise of the fleeing feet*] Leonardo! . . . He is going down the stairs. . . . Leonardo! Leonardo! [*She stops, breathless*] My God, my God! How he trembled before that door!

BIANCA MARIA [*enters through her door, frightened*] Did you call Leonardo? What has happened? Where is Leonardo? Speak, Anna! Where is he?

ANNA. Do not be afraid. . . . He was here, a little while ago; he was here, talking with me, on the loggia. . . . And he went away, I don't know why. . . . I don't know where he went. . . . I called to him because all at once I felt the desire to go out with him. . . . The night is so beautiful. But he did not hear me.

BIANCA MARIA. I was afraid.

ANNA. Do not be afraid, Bianca Maria.

BIANCA MARIA. I was alone in the room of the treasures, placing the jewels around Cassandra, so that when he returned he would find everything done. . . . I was not very tranquil, however. I had from time to time a slight shiver. . . . If you could have seen, in the night, by the light of the lamp, those golden masks! . . . They took on a strangely life-like aspect. . . . A sudden gust of wind put out the lamp and I found myself in darkness; and at that moment I heard you calling Leonardo. . . . I was afraid. . . .

ANNA. You child!

BIANCA MARIA [*clinging to Anna with a sudden motion*] There is a fear, a constant terror in my heart, Anna, that I do not understand. . . . I should like to flee; a mad impulse to flee seizes me, I don't know where, I don't know where. . . . But tell me, you tell me, Anna, what I shall do! Help me, you who are all kindness and all strength, who know how to forgive and how to defend! I place my whole soul in your hands. I place my life in your hands, that are saintly, that are the truth, that have been bathed in my tears. . . . Tell me what I must do!

ANNA [*gently caressing her*] Be calm, be calm. . . .

Do not be afraid! Fear nothing! No one will hurt you, poor soul! I am here, and I will save you. Have faith, have faith! Wait a little longer!

BIANCA MARIA [*with growing excitement*] Anna, Anna, I do not wish to leave you again; I would not like to be away from you any more! I would like to flee with you, go far away with you, and be always at your side, at your feet, your faithful slave, obeying your every wish, watching over you as one guards a holy image, praying for you, dying for you, as your nurse, as your nurse. . . . I feel perfect devotion for you in my soul! No pain, no pain would seem too heavy to bear in serving you in your sorrow. If with all my blood I could spare you these days of anguish and of torment; if at the price of a horrible death, I could destroy every trace of these things, — Anna, Anna, believe me! — I should not hesitate, I should not hesitate.

ANNA. Ah, dear one, all your blood and all your tears could not revive a single smile. All the bounty of spring could not make a plant blossom again, the root of which is injured. Therefore, do not torment yourself, Bianca Maria, do not complain of things that are already accomplished, that already belong to the past. I have placed my days and my dreams outside my own soul . . . the days that have passed, the dreams that have vanished! I wish no one to feel compassion for me, — no one to attempt to console me. I should like to find a peaceful road for my unsteady footsteps, some place where dreams and pain would mingle, where there would be neither noise nor curiosity, and no one to see or to hear. And I should want never to speak again, because in certain hours of life no one knows which words it is better to say, and which it is better to keep to one's self. And, I should like, Bianca Maria, I should like you to have faith in me, as in an older sister, who put herself out of the way quietly, because she understood all, and forgave all . . . quietly . . . quietly . . . not far . . . not too far. . . . Come, come! You promised to read to me, a while ago; you remember? Find the book and let me sit down!

BIANCA MARIA [*leads her to a chair, kneels before her,*

and takes her hands] Listen, Anna, listen. Nothing is lost, nothing is irreparable. It would be impossible to utter more desperate words with a sweeter voice than you have uttered. . . . Ah, do you think I do not understand you? Well then, nothing, nothing is lost; nothing irreparable has happened. . . . I do not know what sudden fear drove me into your arms; I cried to you to save me, to defend me . . . but against a peril that I am ignorant of, against some obscure danger hanging over me without my being able to see it, to recognize it. . . . I am weak; childless terrors can still seize upon my mind of a sudden and unsettle it. . . . Listen, Anna, this is the truth. Who could lie before your face? . . . When you entered there in the room of the golden treasure, and kissed me on the lips, you felt that my lips were pure. . . . They were pure then, they are pure now. By the memory of my mother, by the head of my brother, I swear to you, Anna, that they will remain pure, thus sealed by your own hands. [*She presses upon her mouth the hands of the blind woman.*]

Anna. Do not swear, do not swear! You are sinning against life; it is as if you were to cut down all the roses of the earth, only to withhold them from those that desire them. What does it avail? What does it avail? Can you perhaps cut down the desire? I felt that your lips were pure, pure as the fire; but a few moments before I had also felt two lives reaching out one for the other with all their strength, and looking fixedly across my immutable misery, as through a crystal that was about to break.

Bianca Maria. My God, my God! You are closing every door around. . . .

Anna. One remains open!

Bianca Maria [*with a clear and firm intonation*] I will go through that.

Anna. It is your door, yours; the door of the future. Have faith! Wait just a little longer! [*A pause. Bianca Maria bends her head down in gloomy thought*] Do you smell the fragrance of the myrtle? It is as intoxicating as heated wine: in the freshness of the night wind it preserves all its warmth. Do you smell it? To me, too, it gave a

dizzy spell once. . . . It was in the time of great joy, so very long ago! We were going to Megara, along the Gulf of Ægina. You know that shore? It was then as white as salt, dotted with myrtles and with little storm-twisted pine trees that were mirrored in the calm water. To my ecstatic eyes, the myrtle seemed a fire, burning with a green flame, and the sea was as immaculate and fresh as the corolla of a flower just, just opening. . . .

BIANCA MARIA [*raising her head slowly*] What a sound your voice has, Anna! It is so soft, it goes to the bottom of my soul, like a melody. When you speak of beautiful things, there seems to rise to your lips the echo of I do not know what song. Speak to me again of beautiful things, Anna!

ANNA. You tell me of your dream, Bianca Maria. For what country would you like to set out? For Syracuse? . . . When we came here, we thought of spending the spring at Zante. Alessandro wished to take Leonardo to Zante, for a rest. I do not know the island; but one night, during my first voyage, I saw it from a distance and it seemed to me to be the Island of the Blessed. It was near Myrtia. . . . Myrtia, sweet name! It ought to be your name! . . . It was the hour of sunset. I remember: all around, all around were grand, holy-looking hills, covered with vineyards, so dense that they vied with the even verdure of a meadow, but with something listless about them, as the heat of the day had wilted the tender shoots; and here and there between the drooping vines a mournful row of black cypress trees. The round moon, thin like one's breath upon a mirror, was gliding over the pallid sky, between the tops of the black cypresses. Through a depression in the ground one saw, far away in the sea, the divine form of Zante chiseled in a mass of sapphire, by the most delicate of sculptors, upon a rosy zone. . . . Thus I see it still! There we ought to have spent the spring. I believe there you would have found your oranges to bite like bread. . . . I am thirsty.

BIANCA MARIA. You are thirsty? What do you wish to drink?

ANNA. A little water.

BIANCA MARIA [*rises, goes to the table, and pours water into a glass*] Here is the water.

ANNA [*after drinking*] It is almost tepid. . . . I have always longingly pictured to myself the delight of drinking at the spring with my mouth in the water, as the animals drink. . . . One day I heard Alessandro drinking that way in long draughts, and I envied him. You must get down upon the ground, mustn't you? And support yourself upon your hands . . . the whole face immersed up to your forehead. Is that it? I should like to try. . . . Have you ever tried it?

BIANCA MARIA. I always drink that way at the fountain. It is most delightful. It feels as if the whole face were drinking. The eyelids flutter over the water like butterflies that are about to drown. I have the courage to keep my eyes open, and while the water enters my throat, I discover at its bottom some hidden marvel. I cannot tell you what strange figures are formed by the disposition of the gravel. . . .

ANNA. Your voice, now, is as fresh as a spring. I really hear the water run over your body, as over the statue of a fountain. . . . [*A pause*] Do you not think, Bianca Maria, that the statues at the fountains must be happy? Through their immovable and lasting beauty circulates an animated life that continually renews itself. They enjoy at one and the same time inertia and fluidity. In solitary gardens they look sometimes as if they were in exile, but they are not, because their liquid souls never cease to communicate with the distant mountains, whence they came, still asleep and enclosed in blocks of shapeless marble. They listen astounded to the words which arise to their lips out of the depths of the earth, but they are not deaf to the conversations of the poets and sages, who like to rest, as in a calm retreat, in the musical shade, where the marble immortalizes classic repose. Do they not seem happy to you? I should like well to be one of them, because I have blindness in common with them.

BIANCA MARIA. Oh, Anna, you also possess in common

with them the virtue of calming anguish and infusing forgetfulness! When you speak of beautiful things, he who listens to you forgets his trouble, and believes that he can still live, and that life can still be sweet.

ANNA. Life can still be sweet. Fear nothing! Everything passes away, all is naught. . . . How does, how does Cassandra speak of the things human? "No matter how adverse they are, a sponge soaked in water wipes out every trace." Why do you not read a little? You promised me. . . .

BIANCA MARIA. What do you wish me to read?

ANNA. That dialogue between Cassandra and the chorus of the elders. [*Bianca Maria looks on the table for the book of Æschylus as if under compulsion, almost with reluctance*] Have you found the book?

BIANCA MARIA [*opening the book and turning the leaves*] Yes, here it is.

ANNA. Read a little.

BIANCA MARIA [*reading*]

Chorus.

"Thy fame oracular hath reach'd our ear:
But certes we require no prophet here.

Cassandra.

"Ye gods! What crime is hatching? What fell blow,
Mighty and strange? Mischief beneath this roof
Is plotted; all incurable the woe,
To friends unbearable! Help stands aloof.

Chorus.

"Dark are these oracles. . . ."

ANNA [*interrupting*] No, it is enough. Read no further! It is too funereal. Let us take *Antigone* again, at the place where you ceased reading the other morning. Do you remember? It was the passage where Antigone was

bending under her grief for the first time. It seemed that her voice was gilded like the top of a cypress at sunset. . . .

BIANCA MARIA [*looking for the book of Sophocles*] I cannot find it.

ANNA. You have not seen it since then?

BIANCA MARIA. Ah, here it is. [*She opens the book, looks for the page and reads*]:

Chorus.

"So then, illustrious and lauded,
Thou wanderest toward the hidden dwellings of the dead;
Not consumed by devouring diseases,
Nor as the allotted spoil of war.
But free, but living, alone,
Of all the mortals, thou descendest to Hades.

Antigone

"I heard how of old most miserably perished
The Phrygian stranger,
The daughter of Tantalus, on the summit of Sipilos;
Whom like tenacious ivy
The stony growth enveloped; neither the tears she sheds, —
So goes the story among men —
Nor the snows do ever cease;
But forever do her weeping eyes bathe those crags.
I am much like her, for a god brings to me sleep. . . ."

ANNA [*interrupting*] Ah, the statue of Niobe! Before dying, Antigone sees a stone statue from which pours a fountain of everlasting tears. . . . Enough. Bianca Maria. Read no further. It seems as if death were everywhere. Close the book! Go out upon the loggia and look at the stars. I am tired, very tired; I wish that some god would bring me sleep also. . . . [*She rises and calls*] Nurse! Nurse! [*A pause. No one answers*] Nurse! She does not hear me! Perhaps she is asleep. She too is so tired, poor old woman! I do not like to awaken her. What is

sweeter than profound sleep! [*A pause*] The stillness of this night is incredible. The wind has fallen, — there is not a breath of air stirring. [*She raises her hands up in the air*] Perhaps Alessandro is also asleep. Do you think so? He has not left his room again. No more noise has come from his room. He has closed the door. [*A pause*] What are you going to do now?

BIANCA MARIA [*vaguely, frightened*] I will wait for my brother.

ANNA. Alone, here?

BIANCA MARIA. Alone, here.

ANNA. Where can Leonardo be?

BIANCA MARIA [*trembling*] Where can he be? Why has he not returned? [*A pause*] I am afraid.

ANNA. Do not be afraid. The night is sweet. He will return soon.

BIANCA MARIA. I will wait for him.

ANNA. Do you wish me to remain with you?

BIANCA MARIA. No, no. . . . You are tired. One can see by your face that you are too weary.

ANNA. Will you lead me to the threshold, — only as far as the threshold? I do not wish to awaken my nurse. I can easily find my room by myself.

BIANCA MARIA [*takes her hand and leads her to the threshold*] But everything is dark.

ANNA. For me, there is no change. [*She leans forward into the dark shadow, in the open door*] Do you hear the breathing of my nurse? It is not tranquil. It is a little uneasy. May be she fell asleep in an uncomfortable position. . . . Poor nurse! Dear, dear old soul! [*She listens again, then embraces Bianca Maria*] Thanks. Good-night. Let me kiss your two eyes. Good-night! Go and peace be with you. Go out upon the loggia and look at the stars. [*She disappears in the darkness. Bianca Maria follows her with her gaze for some time; then, frightened, glances around as if seized by intolerable anguish. She takes a few steps toward the loggia. At the foot of the steps she again looks around with frightened eyes, watching the doors. Then she ascends slowly. When she has arrived at the last*

step, she staggers, and leans against a column; she remains thus for some time looking out into the night. Suddenly she slips down at the foot of the column with the noiseless lightness of a falling veil, and thus sunk into herself she bursts into tears.]

CURTAIN

ACT FOUR.

The same room as in the first act. The large loggia is open in the twilight.

[*Leonardo appears on the loggia, looking at the Dead City, over which falls the shadow of evening. His manner is that of a man who marshals all his forces in an extreme resolution. His eyes burn in the earthly pallor of his face as if inflamed by fever. He speaks and moves convulsively, as if in a sort of lucid delirium.*]

LEONARDO. The sepulchers. . . . She might fall into one of them, the deepest one. . . . No, no. . . . Even if she should remain alive, she might suffer. . . . Ah, horrible, horrible! [*He presses his temples with his hands, with a gesture of horror and madness. He descends the steps, into the room, moves about uncertain, vacillating, obeying the fluctuations of his morbid fancy*] It is necessary then; it is necessary. . . . It is necessary that she be no more, that she be no more! . . . Ah, if she could only flee, if she could only disappear, if she were only far away, if her room were empty. . . . Empty! It will be empty, it shall be empty to-night. . . . Her breath, her breath. . . . [*He drops upon a chair, passes his hands over his face as if to dispel a cloud, as if to see more clearly*] There is no escape; there is no other way out. I have thought of everything — have I? Everything has been well considered. He loves her. . . . And she thinks of dying. . . . It is the indelible stain upon my soul. . . . An abyss has suddenly opened. Everything has been broken, everything has been rent asunder at one blow, through her, through her! She is there, so sweet,

so sweet; and through her all this evil. . . . None of us can live any longer. We have ceased to understand each other. The abyss yawns between us, who were, before, one single life, one single soul! . . . There is no escape; there is no other way. [*A pause. He rises, spurred by his tormenting thoughts*] How accomplish it? How accomplish it? She will be here in a little while. . . . Ah, I shall see her, I shall speak to her, I shall hear her voice. . . . If at least I could see in her the saintly sister once more in the last moment! If, looking at her for the last time, my eyes could become pure once more! If I could clasp her in my arms once more without this trembling . . . this horrible trembling! . . . He loves her, he loves her! Since when? How? What has happened between them? . . . Ah, my God, my God, everything in me is infected, everything is contaminated . . . and this thirst which destroys me! [*He feels of his burning throat. He looks for water, approaches the table, fills a glass and drinks with avidity. He trembles, as if struck by a sudden thought*] Ah, the fountain! [*A pause. He trembles, leaning upon the table under the oppression of the new thought, with his eyes wide open and staring.*]

[*Bianca Maria enters from the second right hand door. Her manner reveals discouragement and gloomy weariness.*]

Bianca Maria. You here, Leonardo? I did not know that you had returned. . . .

Leonardo [*controlling his excitement*] Yes, I returned a short time ago. . . . I was thinking of going to see you, but I thought . . . you were asleep. . . . Were you?

Bianca Maria. No, I have not been able to sleep.

Leonardo. How tired you must be!

Bianca Maria. And you?

Leonardo. Oh, I am accustomed to be awake. But you! To wait for me until dawn, there, seated upon a step! Why did you do that? When I returned, when I saw you, your face looked so wan, so ashy. . . . [*In his voice thrills an unexpected tenderness.*]

Bianca Maria. You have been weeping!

LEONARDO. I did not suspect that you were here, and you suddenly rose like a phantom. . . .

BIANCA MARIA. I am always like a phantom to you. I frighten you.

LEONARDO [*bewildered*] No, no. . . .

BIANCA MARIA [*taking his hand*] Why did you run away last night? I know that you ran away. . . .

LEONARDO. I, run away?

BIANCA MARIA. Anna called after you, and in a strangely altered voice.

LEONARDO. She called me? I did not hear. . . .

BIANCA MARIA. And you stayed out all night, until dawn!

LEONARDO. The night was so beautiful; and on my way, the hours passed so rapidly. The night of the solstice is short. I wished to hear the song of the larks at dawn. . . . Still, could I have known you were waiting for me. . . .

BIANCA MARIA. I was waiting for you, weeping.

LEONARDO. Weeping?

BIANCA MARIA [*unable to contain herself*] Yes, yes, pouring out all my tears for you, for you. . . . Do you think that I can live another day like this? Do you think it possible for me to stand this torture any longer? Tell me at least what I shall do. Take me away, take me away; or arrange for us to be here alone. . . . I am ready to obey you in everything. . . . I wish to be alone with you, as before, here or anywhere. Anywhere I will follow you without a murmur. But quick! But quick! To-morrow! If you are not willing, if you delay, you will be responsible for all that may happen. . . . Yours will be the fault, Leonardo. Think of it well!

LEONARDO [*deadly pale, looking into her face, in a choking voice*] Then you love him? Tell me, tell me how much do you love him? Desperately?

BIANCA MARIA [*covering her face*] Oh! Oh!

LEONARDO [*almost beside himself*] And he. . . . Has he told you that he loves you? When? When did he tell you? Answer! Do you believe that he cannot be cured of his love for you?

BIANCA MARIA [*still covering her face with her hands*] Oh! Oh! What a question to ask of me!

LEONARDO [*is about to speak again, but restrains himself. He moves away with irresolute steps, looks at the doors, looks at the loggia, then turns to his sister*] Forgive me! I am not angry with you. You are blameless. . . . A cruel destiny hangs over us; and we must submit to its iron law. You are without fault. You are pure; are you not, sister? And you will remain pure; you will know no shame.

BIANCA MARIA [*taking courage and throwing her arms around his neck*] Yes, yes, brother. Tell me what we shall do. I devoted my life to you when we were left alone in the world; I ought to live for you alone, in the future. Tell me what we shall do! I am ready.

LEONARDO. I shall tell you. . . . But not here. . . . Shall we go out? Shall we go and sit down there . . . by the fountain of Perseus?

BIANCA MARIA. Let us go out. . . . But down there the fragrance of the myrtle is so strong that it made me ill last night.

LEONARDO. To-night it will not be too powerful, for there is a wind blowing that will disperse it.

BIANCA MARIA. Let us go.

LEONARDO [*seems unable to move, overcome by excessive anguish. He glances around despairingly, gazing at every object as if he, too, were looking at it for the last time*] Do you not need . . . to take something . . . from your room? . . . Do you not wish to cover your head?

BIANCA MARIA. No, the evening is warm. It is lightening over toward the bay.

LEONARDO [*irresolute*] Perhaps . . . it may rain. . . .

BIANCA MARIA. May God grant it! But there was not a cloud in the sky a moment ago.

LEONARDO. And to-day, do you know? a procession started from Fichtia for the Chapel of the Prophet Elijah.

BIANCA MARIA. I heard the chanting in the distance. . . . Why do you look at me so?

LEONARDO [*trembling*] I am looking at your weary eyes. . . . They worry me. . . . Are you sleepy?

BIANCA MARIA. No, I am not sleepy any longer. . . . I will sleep later when everything is settled. . . . Let us go. You must tell me. . . . But what are you thinking of?

LEONARDO. Of what am I thinking? Oh, a strange reminiscence. . . .

BIANCA MARIA. What reminiscence?

LEONARDO. Oh, nothing . . . something childish. . . . I was thinking of that snake-skin we found on the road, ascending to Mycenæ the first time . . . a childish idea. . . . I do not know why it came back to my mind. . . .

BIANCA MARIA. I kept it, you know! I put it between the pages of a book, like a bookmark. . . .

LEONARDO. Ah, you preserved it. . . . [*He draws still nearer to his sister, lowering his voice*] Tell me, tell me, how long since you saw Anna?

BIANCA MARIA. Several hours.

LEONARDO. Is she there, in her rooms?

BIANCA MARIA. I believe she is there.

LEONARDO. Has she never spoken to you . . . has she never spoken to you about these things?

BIANCA MARIA [*bowing her head in pain*] Yes, yes. . . . She knows; she suffers. . . .

LEONARDO. How so? How did she speak to you?

BIANCA MARIA. Like a sister, with the kindness of a sister. . . .

LEONARDO. Did she forgive you? Did she kiss you?

BIANCA MARIA. Yes. . . .

LEONARDO [*trembling, hesitating*] And he . . . have you seen him . . . since last night?

BIANCA MARIA. No. . . . He is not here. . . .

LEONARDO. Did Anna tell you . . . where he went?

BIANCA MARIA. To Nauplia.

LEONARDO. When will he return?

BIANCA MARIA. To-night, perhaps presently. . . . [*A pause*] What are you looking at behind me? [*She looks around, frightened, as if to see if there is some one behind her.*]

LEONARDO. Nothing, nothing. . . . It seemed to me that some one was about to enter through that door. [*He*

points to the door leading to Anna's rooms. Bianca Maria listens.]

BIANCA MARIA. May be Anna is coming now. . . . Let us go. [*She takes her brother's hand and begins to pull him toward the door leading to the stairs.*]

LEONARDO. Is Anna coming? [*He follows his sister, turning his head around and looking at the second door to the left, which opens.*]

[*Anna appears on the threshold, followed by The Nurse.*]

ANNA. Who is going out through the staircase door? [*Leonardo and Bianca Maria disappear without answering*] Who is it, nurse?

NURSE. The brother and sister.

ANNA. Ah, they are going down the stairs. . . . Where are they going? [*She advances toward the door, The Nurse accompanying her. When she arrives at the threshhold, she bends forward and calls to them*] Bianca Maria! Leonardo! Where are you going? [*No one answers*] Bianca Maria! Where are you going? Where are you going? [*No one answers*] Go, nurse, run, overtake them. . . . [*The Nurse goes out. The blind woman, seized by a vague anxiety, remains, listening, near the door*] Where are they going? They did not answer. . . . Yet they must have heard my voice; they had but just descended. . . . It looks as if they were fleeing. . . . Where to? . . . How my heart beats! [*She places her hand over her heart and listens for The Nurse's return*] He is to speak to me, to-night . . . at this very hour. . . . What will he say to me? It seems something important has been resolved upon. . . . [*She hears the step of The Nurse upon the stairs*] Nurse! You return alone?

NURSE [*reënters, breathless*] I overtook them. . . . They told me they were going to the fountain . . . they would return in a little while. . . .

ANNA. Did they not hear me call them?

NURSE. They walked rapidly, as if in haste.

ANNA. Is it late? Is it night yet?

NURSE. One can hardly see. There is a warm wind

blowing, which raises the dust. It is lightening toward the sea.

ANNA. Is it going to storm?

NURSE. It is a mackerel-sky. . . . It is lightening from a serene sky.

ANNA. When will Alessandro return?

NURSE. This is the hour.

ANNA. Let us wait. [*The Nurse takes her to a seat and sits near her upon a low stool. They both remain silent for a long time. Anna is very alert and stirs at every little noise*] Do you hear? Do you hear that noise? Who is playing? It sounds like a flute.

NURSE. 'Tis a shepherd passing by.

ANNA. How sweet it sounds. It sounds like a flute.

NURSE. It is a flute made of a reed.

[*The blind woman listens for some time.*]

ANNA. It is an old melody which it seems I have heard, but I know not when.

NURSE. He has passed by here at other times, this shepherd.

ANNA. No, it seems to me I heard it at a time of which I have no memory. . . . It is as if you were telling me now one of those old fables of yours, nurse. How many things, how many things there are in the sound of a little reed! My heart is full to bursting, nurse, as heavy as a stone. . . . Do you think that they met the shepherd? I mean Bianca Maria and her brother.

NURSE. May be they did.

ANNA [*anxiously*] How did they look? Did you look at them closely? Did you look into their faces? How did they look?

NURSE. I hardly know. . . . How should they have looked?

ANNA. Were they excited? Were they sad?

NURSE. They looked as if they were in haste.

ANNA. But he, her brother. . . . Did you not look him in the face?

NURSE. I did not get near to them. They kept on walking.

ANNA. Which one of the two was walking ahead?

NURSE. They were holding each other's hands, I believe.

ANNA. Ah, they held each other's hands. . . . And their steps were firm?

NURSE. They walked rapidly.

[*A pause. Anna is thoughtful and vigilant.*]

ANNA. And Alessandro does not return!

NURSE. This is the hour. He must be nearly here.

ANNA [*rising impatiently*] Go out upon the loggia, nurse, and look.

[*The Nurse obeys.*]

NURSE. What a hot wind! It is as if it came from a furnace. . . . I think I see a man on horseback on the road. . . .

ANNA [*with a start*] Is it Alessandro?

NURSE. Yes, yes, it is the master. Here he comes. [*She descends the steps.*]

ANNA. Go, nurse. Make sure that everything is ready in his room. Do not come until I call you. Is there still a little light here?

NURSE. One can scarcely see any longer.

ANNA. Bring a lamp.

[*The Nurse goes out at the left. Anna listens anxiously for the sound of Alessandro's steps on the stairs.*]

[*Alessandro enters. He is so absorbed in his painful thoughts that he does not notice Anna's presence. He goes toward his rooms without speaking.*]

ANNA. Alessandro!

ALESSANDRO [*startled, stops*] You here, Anna? I did not see you. It is almost dark.

ANNA. I was waiting for you.

ALESSANDRO. I tarried a little. Upon the road the wind raised such a thick dust that it was difficult to advance. It is the hot breath of the desert. Night seems to descend like a fiery cinder. . . . Where is Leonardo?

ANNA. He went out a while ago with his sister.

ALESSANDRO [*in an unsteady voice*] Do you not know where he went?

ANNA. He descended to the fountain of Perseus.

[*The Nurse enters, carrying a lighted lamp, but when she is about to place it on the table, a gust of wind blows it out. The door behind her closes violently.*]

NURSE. Ah, it went out! I must close the stairway door. The wind is rising. [*She goes to close the door, then returns to the table to light the lamp again. Anna's manner expresses an undefined terror. She listens in the direction of the open loggia as if to discover distant cries. The nurse goes out on the left, closing the door behind her.*]

ANNA. Alessandro! Come nearer, listen. . . . [*Alessandro approaches her, uneasy*] Do you hear nothing? Do you not seem to hear . . .

ALESSANDRO. What? [*Anna does not answer*] It is the wind whistling through the openings in the walls and beneath the Gate of Lions.

ANNA. Is a storm brewing?

ALESSANDRO [*ascending rapidly to the loggia*] No. The sky is entirely clear. The stars are beginning to appear. The sickle of the moon rests on the crest of the Acropolis. The wind roars strangely in the Dead City, engulfing itself, may be, in the cavities of the tombs. It sounds like the roll of drums. Do you not hear it? [*He descends the steps. Anna grasps his arm, the prey of an unconquerable terror.*]

ALESSANDRO. What is the matter, Anna?

ANNA. I am restless. . . . I cannot overcome the anxiety that chokes my throat. . . . I think of those two down there. . . .

ALESSANDRO [*in extreme excitement, misunderstanding her*] What? You know. . . . You know about it? . . . About that terrible thing? . . . Who, who could have told you . . . Leonardo, perhaps? Has Leonardo spoken to you? How could he . . . to you. . . .

ANNA [*bewildered*] Why, what do you mean? What are you thinking of? . . . No, no; he has not spoken to me; he has told me nothing. . . . I . . . I spoke to him last night, here. . . . I who knew, I who knew already . . . oh, but without complaint, without rancor, Alessandro. . . .

ALESSANDRO. You spoke to him, of that horrible thing! You had the courage to speak to him about it, Anna! But how? How did you know? Tell me, how did you know? How have you been able to penetrate his secret, while even I, up to last night, entertained not a shadow of suspicion! Tell me, how did you know?

ANNA [*more and more confused*] His secret! What do you mean? What secret? Of what horrible thing are you speaking, Alessandro?

ALESSANDRO [*realizing his mistake, confounded*] I meant . . .

ANNA. Is there something else? Is there something else?

ALESSANDRO [*grasping her hands and conquering with an effort the emotion that suffocates him*] Listen to me, Anna, you who know how to bear any burden of grief, you who never have been afraid of suffering, and who know all the bitterness of life. We have reached a grave moment, very grave. A tearing whirlwind is carrying us to I do not know what destination. We are the prey of mysterious and invincible powers. You feel it, Anna, you feel that a horrible knot has been tied about us, and that we must cut it. We have avoided speaking of it, up to this moment, because to me, as well as to you, the only way, worthy of us and of what we have been, was to accept the inevitable in silence. But now the catastrophe has come. For each one of us the moment has come to look Destiny in the face. . . . Closing the eyes avails nothing. Everything that is, is necessary. I demand, therefore, of you, Anna, the truth. What happened last night? I demand the truth.

ANNA. The truth. . . . Ah, it will not profit, it will not profit! There are moments in life when no one knows which words it is better to utter, and which it is better to bury. . . . Yesterday I asked Leonardo's forgiveness for having spoken, now I ask your forgiveness, Alessandro. You said well, you said well, silence alone is worthy. To harm no one, silence should not have been broken. But *he* was there. . . . So many times, so many times I have

felt that he was suffering, suffering cruelly. . . . I alone seemed to be the cause of such great agony, I alone the encumbrance! And I felt a sisterly desire to comfort him, to do him some good, to show him that everything was understood and settled. . . . And last night, I do not know what desperation there was in him when he came near me: I do not know what need of confidence. . . . It seemed that he had been weeping, that something in his heart had melted away. . . . The stars seemed beautiful to him once more. . . . Then I felt the need of doing him some good; and I spoke to him. . . . I spoke to him of that poor creature and of you. . . . I wished to drive out of his soul all bitterness, and all the unjust rancor against that dear girl, who possesses no other fault save that of loving and being loved. . . . And I spoke to him of her, and I spoke to him of you, without complaining, without humiliating myself, but giving him some hope. . . .

ALESSANDRO [*entirely disconcerted*] Some hope! And he . . . do you believe that he already knew? Did it seem to you, Anna, that he already knew? . . . It is impossible! Impossible! Only a little while before, he had spoken to me. . . .

ANNA [*bewildered*] He did not know? . . . He did not know? . . . [*Thinking over his conversation she seems to discover some clews she had not noticed before, and to grasp the truth all of a sudden. Her exclamation is like a pent-up cry*] Ah, possibly! . . . He spoke of not understanding. . . . Yes, yes. . . . He said, "Are you sure? Are you sure?" And then. . . . Ah, but now? There is something else then, there is something else?

[*Alessandro moves about the room uncertain, as one who seeks a loophole, but does not find it.*]

ALESSANDRO [*in a low voice, speaking to himself*] After what he had revealed to me! . . .

ANNA. Tell me the truth now, Alessandro! I demand the truth of you.

ALESSANDRO [*re-approaching her*] And what did *he* do? What did *he* do then? Where did he go?

ANNA. He ran out, he fled. . . . I know from his

sister that he came back this morning at dawn. . . . She had waited for him until then. . . .

ALESSANDRO. Flight, flight. . . . It seems there is no other way but flight. . . . [*He moves about uncertain, not knowing what decision to make*] Ah, when will we look into each other's eyes again. . . .

ANNA [*pressing*] But tell me the truth now!

ALESSANDRO. And they have gone out together. . . . They went down to the fountain. . . . How long ago?

ANNA. A few moments before you came back.

ALESSANDRO. Together . . . together . . . down yonder. . . . [*His excitement increases from moment to moment*] And they were here with you before going? . . . What did they say?

ANNA. No, I entered as they were descending the stairs. . . . I called after them, they did not answer. . . . I sent nurse to overtake them. . . .

ALESSANDRO. And then?

ANNA. They told her they were going down to the fountain for a while, to return presently. . . . But tell me, tell me! . . . [*She grasps Alessandro by the arm as he is about to ascend to the loggia. They ascend thus together and separate in the shade, toward the balustrade. After a few moments Alessandro comes back alone. Obeying an instinctive impulse, he runs to the door, opens it and descends the stairs precipitately. The blind woman appears between the columns, seized with terror when she starts to follow her husband*] Alessandro! Alessandro! [*No one answers. She gropes about in the air and encounters one of the columns; supporting herself by that, she descends the first step, then the others*] Alessandro! . . . He is no longer here. . . . I am alone. . . . Ah, Lord! Give me light! [*Following the hot current of the wind, which enters through the wide-open door, she reaches the threshold; holding to one of the door jambs she makes one step toward the stairway, and disappears in the dark.*]

CURTAIN

ACT FIVE.

A wild and lonely spot in a hollow which forms between the minor horn of the mountain of Eubœa and the inaccessible side of the citadel. Myrtles grow luxuriantly between the rough rocks and cyclopic ruins. The water of the fountain of Perseus, gushing forth from between the rocks, gathers in a shell-like cavity, out of which it runs, to lose itself through the stony ground. In the ancient solitude, already wrapped in the mystery of night, is heard the ceaseless gurgling of the springs.

[*Near the edge of the fountain, at the foot of a bush of myrtle, lies the corpse of Bianca Maria, supine, rigid, chaste. Her wet garments cling to the body; her hair, soaked with water, covers her face in broad bands; her arms are stretched by her sides; her feet are joined together like the feet of the statues upon ancient tombs. Alessandro, seated upon a rock, with his elbows on his knees and his temples pressed between his hands, looks fixedly at the dead girl, silent in frightful immobility. Upon the opposite side Leonardo stands, leaning against a great rock, which he clutches from time to time with his fingers, convulsively and in despair, as the fingers of a shipwrecked sailor clutch the rock emerging out of the abyss. In the deathlike silence is heard the gurgling of the water and the intermittent soughing of the wind in the bending myrtles. Suddenly Leonardo moves away from the rock, and kneels by the side of the corpse of his sister, bending over as if to touch her.*]

ALESSANDRO [*stopping him with a quick gesture and an imperious cry*] Do not touch her! Do not touch her!

LEONARDO [*drawing back, without rising*] No, no, I will not touch her. . . . She is yours, she is yours. . . .

[*A pause. He looks at the corpse with superhuman intensity of grief and love. A delirium seems to assail him. His voice is by turns hoarse and piercing, almost unrecognizable*] Do you believe, do you believe . . . I should profane her if I touched her? . . . No, no. . . . Now I am pure: I am wholly pure. . . . If she should rise, she could walk upon my soul as upon the immaculate snow. . . . If she could revive, all my thoughts of her would be like the lilies, like the lilies. . . . Ah, who will be able to tell upon this earth of loving a human creature as I love her? Not even you, not even you love her as I do! . . . No love equals mine, upon this earth. . . . All my soul is a heaven for her departed spirit. . . . [*His voice, impetuous and ardent, rises like a delirium that increases, and falls with a thrill of supreme tenderness*] Who, who would have done for her what I did? Would you have had the courage to accomplish this atrocity, to save her soul from the horror which was about to overwhelm it? Ah, you loved her, you loved her with all the strength of your life, because she had to be loved in that way, but you do not know, you do not know what a soul she possessed. . . . All the gifts of the earth and all its beauties — beauties of which you have never even dreamed! — were in her soul. . . . It seemed that every morning when she awoke, all the breezes of spring passed over her soul, and softened it and made it bloom. . . . It seemed every night as if the sweetest things of the day remained in her soul, and she mixed and prepared them for me, offering them to me as one offers a loaf of bread. . . . Ah, thus, thus, for a long time she has nourished me; with this bread she nourished me at the close of my every day. . . . She knew how to change the slightest smile into great felicity. . . . The smallest of my joys expanded infinitely in her soul, infinitely, like a circle in calm water, until it gave me the illusion of a great happiness. . . . Ah, you do not know, you do not know what a soul she possessed. . . . No other creature could be her equal, on this earth. . . . There was not a single bitter drop in all her blood. . . . A while ago . . . [*He interrupts himself, starting like a sick man, whose*

muscles twisted by intolerable spasms]. . . . A while ago . . . all her tender life was trembling in her hair under my hand. . . . [*He trembles so violently, lying on the ground, that Alessandro rises and attempts to go to him, but he seems unable to move, and falls back upon his stone*] Ah, when she bent over the water to drink . . . I heard the first draught flow down her throat. . . . It seemed to me that she drank out of my heart, that in that draught passed away all the pain suffered, the whole shameful condition, all knowledge, all memory, my entire being. . . . Empty, empty I was, and blind when I threw myself upon her. . . . Death was riding my shoulders and pressing me with his knees of iron. . . . The world was destroyed. . . . A thousand centuries . . . a second. . . . And I was there upon the stones. . . . And in the water, still agitated from the plunge, her hair . . . the hair around her head, half immersed. . . . Ah, who, who would have done for her what I did? . . . I raised her, I saw her face again. . . . "All her face encircled by her hair, beat like a violent pulse" — thus, thus, Anna spoke last night: she who had held it in her hands, who had felt it throb between her fingers; and I saw her face again, which no longer pulsated, her cold face dripping with water. . . . I lowered her eyelids over her eyes. . . . Ah, sweeter than a flower upon a flower. . . . And every stain has disappeared from my soul, I have become pure, all pure. All the holiness of my first love has returned to my soul like a torrent of light. . . . Another gift from her, another gift from her, through death. . . . To be able to love her again thus, I killed her. In order that you might love her thus under my eyes, you, no longer separated from me, you, without further cruelty and without further remorse — for this, for this I killed her. . . . O my brother, O my brother in life and in death, reunited to me, forever reunited to me by this sacrifice that I made for you. . . . Look at her! Look at her! She is perfect; now she is perfect. Now she may be adored as a being divine. . . . In the deepest of my sepulchers I will place her and around her I will put all my treasures. . . . For you, for you, all that which is resplendent, forever for

you all that which is pure. . . . Beloved! Beloved! If we could but relight, for one instant, with all our blood, your pallid face, that you might open, for one instant, your eyes, that you might see us, that you might hear our cry of love and grief. . . . Sister! Sister! [*He bends over the dead body, calling her with a repeated heart-rending cry, stretching his trembling hands out toward the pallid face, which rests, motionless, under the wet strands of hair. Unable to resist that cry, Alessandro rises, passes before the feet of the corpse, goes near his friend, stoops and places a hand upon his forehead to feel his fever, to calm the delirium that seems the beginning of madness. Leonardo, at the contact, shows some relief. His contracted nerves relax a little; his voice falls*] Let me kiss her feet, her little feet. [*He drags himself to the feet of the dead girl, bows his head and remains thus for some time. Alessandro also prostrates himself next to him. During this pause the sighing of the fountain is heard. Leonardo raises his head and remains with eyes fixed on the motionless feet*] One day she was on the shore of the sea, seated upon the sand, with her knees under her chin; and dreaming her beautiful dreams, she enveloped her supple feet, like two tender leaves, in her flowing tresses. The sea was sleeping before her like an innocent child, lightly breathing. . . . [*A pause. He shivers, struck by another remembrance*] Ah, that cursed day, before the fire. . . . [*He covers his face with his hands, and bends again to the earth*] Forgive! Forgive!

[*A pause. Alessandro, disturbed, turns toward the rock in the background, where the path opens.*]

ALESSANDRO [*rising suddenly to his feet*] A step! I seem to hear a step down yonder, upon the path. . . . Listen! [*Leonardo also rises to his feet, terrified. Both listen, breathless*] No. Perhaps I was mistaken. . . . May be it was the wind in the myrtles. . . . Some stone may have rolled down. . . .

LEONARDO. I do not know. . . . My heart beats so, it deafens my ears. . . . I hear nothing more. . . .

[*Alessandro goes to the rock in the background and spies. Only the faint gurgling of the water is heard.*]

ALESSANDRO [*turns to his friend, who is looking fixedly at the corpse, and shakes him*] What shall we do now? We must carry her away from here. . . . Where shall we take her? Shall we carry her into the house now? And Anna . . . Anna. . . . What shall we tell her?

LEONARDO [*bewildered, looking around*] Anna . . . Anna . . . she is waiting for me, at this hour . . . she promised me . . . she promised . . . last night. . . .

ALESSANDRO. What did she promise you?

LEONARDO. To wait for me, to wait for me. . . .

ALESSANDRO. To wait for you? Where? What for?

LEONARDO. She thought . . . she wished . . .

ALESSANDRO. She wished what? . . .

LEONARDO. She wished to go away . . . to disappear. . . .

ALESSANDRO. Ah! [*A pause. Both look instinctively toward the path between the rocks in the background. The murmuring of the fountain is heard*] What shall we tell her? What shall we do, now? . . . Do you wish to remain here? . . . I am going . . . going . . . to get . . . the shroud. . . .

LEONARDO [*stricken with unconquerable terror*] No, no, do not go, do not leave me. . . . Let us remain here, let us stay!

ALESSANDRO. But Anna . . . Anna. . . . [*He starts and listens*] Some one is coming, some one is approaching. . . . A step, I heard a step. . . . Ah, if it were. . . . We must hide her. . . . Let us carry her over there, between the myrtles, in the thicket. . . . Leonardo, do you not hear me? [*He shakes Leonardo, who seems petrified*] Let us carry her over there, between the myrtles. . . . I will take her by the shoulders. . . . Gently! Gently! [*He leans over the upper part of the body, while Leonardo stoops over to raise the lower limbs. At this moment the voice of the blind woman is heard in the path.*]

ANNA [*between the rocks, in the background, still invisible*] Bianca Maria! Bianca Maria! [*The two men let go of the corpse; they rise, deadly pale, unable to move, terrified*] Bianca Maria! [*The blind woman appears be-*

tween the rocks, alone, groping her way in the shade. As no one answers, she takes a few steps forward, with despairing anxiety] Alessandro! Leonardo! [*She advances toward the corpse, and almost touches it with her foot. The two men stand, unable to make a gesture or to utter a word.*]

ALESSANDRO [*at the moment in which Anna's foot is about to touch the corpse*] Stop! Stop! Anna!

[*Anna has, however, already felt the lifeless body against her feet. She stoops over the dead girl, utterly distracted, feeling about until she reaches the face and the hair, still wet with the death-giving water. She shudders from head to foot at the clammy touch, then utters a piercing shriek in which she seems to exhale her soul.*]

ANNA. Ah. . . . I see! I see!

CURTAIN

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